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BY LESLIE STEPHEN

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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HOURS IN A LIBRARY

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Mr. Swinburne, in his recent essay upon Miss Brontë, has, as usual, bestowed the most enthusiastic and generous praise with a lavish hand, and bestowed it upon worthy objects. And, as usual, he seems to be a little too much impressed with the necessary connection between illuminating in honour of a hero and breaking the windows or burning the effigies of the hero's rivals. I do not wish to examine the justice of his assaults, and still less to limp on halting and prosaic feet after his eloquent discourse. I propose only to follow an inquiry suggested by a part of his argument. After all, though criticism cannot boast of being a science, it ought to aim at something like a scientific basis, or at least to proceed in a scientific spirit. The critic, therefore, before abandoning himself to the oratorical impulse, should endeavour to classify the phenomena with which he is dealing as calmly as if he were ticketing a fossil in a museum. The most glowing eulogy, the most bitter denunciation, have their proper place; but they belong to the art of persuasion, and form no part of scientific method. Our literary, like our religious, creed should rest upon a purely rational ground, and be exposed to logical tests. Our faith in an author must, in the first instance, be the product of instinctive sympathy, instead of deliberate reason. It may be propagated by the contagion of enthusiasm, and preached

with all the fervour of proselytism. But when we are seeking to justify our emotions, we must endeavour to get for the time into the position of an independent spectator, applying with rigid impartiality such methods as are best calculated to free us from the influence of personal bias.

Undoubtedly it is a very difficult task to be alternately witness and judge; to feel strongly, and yet to analyse coolly; to love every feature in a familiar face, and yet to decide calmly upon its intrinsic ugliness or beauty. To be an adequate critic is almost to be a contradiction in terms; to be susceptible to a force, and yet free from its influence; to be moving with the stream, and yet to be standing on the bank. It is especially difficult in the case of writers like Miss Brontë, and of critics who were in the most enthusiastic age when her fame was in its early freshness. It is almost impossible not to have overpowering prejudices in regard to a character so intense, original, and full of special idiosyncrasy. If you did not love her you must hate her: or, since hatred for so noble a sufferer would imply unreasonable brutality, we may say, feel strongly a hopeless uncongeniality of temperament. The power of exciting such feelings is, indeed, some testimony to an author's intrinsic force; and it may explain the assertion of her latest biographer. If it be true, as he says, that she has been comparatively neglected of late years, that is what may easily happen in the case of writers more remarkable for intensity than comprehensive power. Their real audience must always be the comparatively small number who are in sympathy with their peculiar moods. But their vigour begins by impressing and overawing a large number of persons who do not feel this spontaneous sympathy. They conquer by sheer force minds whom they do not attract by milder methods. In literature, at any rate, violent conquests are generally transitory; and after a time, those who have obeyed the rule against their natural inclination fall away

and leave an audience composed of those alone who have been swayed by a deeper attraction. Charlotte Brontë, and perhaps her sister Emily in an even higher degree, must have a certain interest for all intelligent observers of character. But only a minority will thoroughly and unreservedly enjoy the writings which embody so peculiar an essence. Some scenery—rich pasturage and abounding rivers and forest-clad hills—appeals more or less to everybody. It is only a few who really love the lonely cairn on a wind-swept moor. An accident may make it the fashion to affect admiration for such peculiar aspects of nature; but, like all affectations, it will die away after a time, and the faithful lovers be reduced to a narrow band.

The comparative eclipse, then—if eclipse there be—of Charlotte Brontë's fame, does not imply want of power, but want of comprehensiveness. There is a certain *primâ facie* presumption against a writer who appeals only to a few, though it may be amply rebutted by showing that the few are also fit. The two problems must go together; why is the charm so powerful, and why is it so limited? Any intense personality has so far a kind of double-edged influence. Shakespeare sympathises with everybody, and therefore everyone with him. Swift scorns and loathes a great part of the world, and therefore if people in general read Swift, or said honestly what they felt, many readers would confess to a simple feeling of aversion to his writings. There is, however, a further distinction. One may dislike such a man as Swift, but one cannot set him aside. His amazing intellectual vigour, the power with which he states some of the great problems of life, and the trenchant decision of his answer, give him a right to be heard. We may shudder, but we are forced to listen. If with equal force of character his intellectual power had been less, we should feel the shock without the mysterious attraction. He would be an unpleasant phenomenon, and one which might be simply neglected. It is because he

brings his peculiar views to bear upon problems of universal interest that we cannot afford simply to drop him out of mind. The power of grasping general truths is necessary to give a broad base to a writer's fame, though his capacity for tender and deep emotion is that which makes us love or hate him.

Mr. Swinburne takes Miss Brontë to illustrate the distinction between "genius" and "intellect." Genius, he says, as the most potent faculty, can most safely dispense with its ally. If genius be taken to mean the poetic as distinguished from the scientific type of mind—that which sees intuitively, prefers synthesis to analysis, and embodies ideas in concrete symbols instead of proceeding by rule and measure, and constructing diagrams in preference to drawing pictures—the truth is undeniable and important. The reasoner gives us mechanism and constructs automata where the seer creates living and feeling beings. The contrast used to be illustrated by the cases of Jonson and Shakespeare—by the difference between the imaginative vigour of "Antony and Cleopatra," and the elaborate construction of "Sejanus." We must add, however, that the two qualities of mind are not mutually exclusive. The most analytic mind has some spark of creative power, and the great creators are capable of deliberate dissection. Shakespeare could reflect; and Jonson could see. The ideally perfect mind would be capable of applying each method with equal facility in its proper place.

Genius, therefore, manifested in any high degree, must be taken to include intellect, if the words are to be used in this sense. Genius begins where intellect ends; or takes by storm where intellect has to make elaborate approaches according to the rules of scientific strategy. One sees where the other demonstrates, but the same principles are common to both. To say that a writer shows more genius than intellect may mean

simply that, as an artist, he proceeds by the true artistic method, and does not put us off with scientific formulæ galvanised into an internal semblance of life. But it may mean that his reflective powers are weak, that he has not assimilated the seminal ideas of his time, and is at a loss in the higher regions of philosophic thought. If so, you are setting limits to the sphere of his influence, and showing that he is incapable of uttering the loftiest aspirations and the deepest emotions of his fellows. A great religious teacher may prefer a parable to a theory, but the parable is impressive because it gives the most vivid embodiment of a truly philosophical theory.

Miss Brontë, as her warmest admirers would grant, was not and did not in the least affect to be a philosophical thinker. And because a great writer, to whom she has been gratuitously compared, is strong just where she is weak, her friends have an injudicious desire to make out that the matter is of no importance, and that her comparative poverty of thought is no injury to her work. There is no difficulty in following them so far as to admit that her work is none the worse for containing no theological or philosophical disquisitions, or for showing no familiarity with the technicalities of modern science and metaphysics. But the admission by no means follows that her work does not suffer very materially by the comparative narrowness of the circle of ideas in which her mind habitually revolved. Perhaps if she had been familiar with Hegel or Sir W. Hamilton, she would have intruded undigested lumps of metaphysics, and introduced vexatious allusions to the philosophy of identity or to the principle of the excluded middle. But it is possible, also, that her conceptions of life and the world would have been enriched and harmonised, and that, without giving us more scientific dogmas, her characters would have embodied more fully the dominating ideas of the time. There is no province of inquiry—

historical, scientific, or philosophical—from which the artist may not derive useful material; the sole question is whether it has been properly assimilated and transformed by the action of the poetic imagination. By attempting to define how far Miss Brontë's powers were in fact thus bounded, we shall approximately decide her place in the great hierarchy of imaginative authors. That it was a very high one, I take to be undeniable. Putting aside living writers, the only female novelist whom one can put distinctly above her is George Sand; for Miss Austen, whom most critics place upon a still higher level, differs so widely in every way that "comparison" is absurd. It is almost silly to draw a parallel between writers when every great quality in one is "conspicuous by its absence" in the other.

The most obvious of all remarks about Miss Brontë is the close connection between her life and her writings. In no books is the author more completely incarnated. She is the heroine of her two most powerful novels; for Lucy Snowe is avowedly her own likeness, and Lucy Snowe differs only by accidents from Jane Eyre; whilst her sister is the heroine of the third novel. All the minor characters, with scarcely an exception, are simply portraits, and the more successful in proportion to their fidelity. The scenery and even the incidents are, for the most part, equally direct transcripts from reality. And, as this is almost too palpable a peculiarity to be expressly mentioned, it seems to be an identical proposition that the study of her life is the study of her novels. More or less true of all imaginative writers, this must be pre-eminently true of Miss Brontë. Her experience, we might say, has been scarcely transformed in passing through her mind. She has written down not only her feelings, but the more superficial accidents of her life. She has simply given fictitious names and dates, with a more or less imaginary thread of narrative, to

her own experience at school, as a governess, at home, and in Brussels. "Shirley" contains a continuous series of photographs of Haworth and its neighbourhood; as "Villette" does of Brussels: and if "Jane Eyre" is not so literal, except in the opening account of the school-life, much of it is almost as strictly autobiographical. It is one of the oddest cases of an author's self-delusion that Miss Brontë should have imagined that she could remain anonymous after the publication of "Shirley," and the introduction of such whole-length portraits from the life as the Yorke family. She does not appear to have been herself conscious of the closeness of her adherence to facts. "You are not to suppose," she says in a letter given by Mrs. Gaskell, "any of the characters in 'Shirley' intended as real portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest* never to *dictate*." She seems to be thinking chiefly of her "heroes and heroines," and would perhaps have admitted that the minor personages were less idealised. But we must suppose also that she failed to appreciate fully the singularity of characters which, in her seclusion, she had taken for average specimens of the world at large. If I take my village for the world, I cannot distinguish the particular from the universal; and must assume that the most distinctive peculiarities are unnoticeably commonplace. The amazing vividness of her portrait-painting is the quality which more than any other makes her work unique amongst modern fiction. Her realism is something peculiar to herself; and only the crudest of critics could depreciate its merits on the ground of its fidelity to facts. The hardest of all feats is to see what is before our eyes. What is called the creative power of genius is much more the power of insight into commonplace things and characters. The realism of the De Foe variety produces an illusion, by

describing the most obvious aspects of everyday life, and introducing the irrelevant and accidental. A finer kind of realism is that which, like Miss Austen's, combines exquisite powers of minute perception with a skill which can light up the most delicate miniatures with an unfailing play of humour. A more impressive kind is that of Balzac, where the most detailed reproduction of realities is used to give additional force to the social tragedies which are being enacted at our doors. The specific peculiarity of Miss Brontë seems to be the power of revealing to us the potentiality of intense passions lurking behind the scenery of everyday life. Except in the most melodramatic—which is also the weakest—part of "Jane Eyre," we have lives almost as uneventful as those of Miss Austen, and yet charged to the utmost with latent power. A parson at the head of a school-feast somehow shows himself as a "Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood;" a professor lecturing a governess on composition is revealed as a potential Napoleon; a mischievous schoolboy is obviously capable of developing into a Columbus or a Nelson; even the most commonplace natural objects, such as a row of beds in a dormitory, are associated, and naturally associated, with the most intense emotions. Miss Austen makes you feel that a tea-party in a country parsonage may be as amusing as the most brilliant meeting of cosmopolitan celebrities; and Miss Brontë that it may display characters capable of shaking empires and discovering new worlds. The whole machinery is in a state of the highest electric tension, though there is no display of thunder and lightning to amaze us.

The power of producing this effect without stepping one hand's-breadth beyond the most literal and unmistakable fidelity to ordinary facts is explicable, one would say, so far as genius is explicable at all, only in one way. A mind of extraordinary activity within a narrow sphere

has been brooding constantly upon a small stock of materials, and a sensitive nature has been exposed to an unusual pressure from the hard facts of life. The surroundings must surely have been exceptional, and the receptive faculties impressible even to morbidness, to produce so startling a result; and the key seemed to be given by Mrs. Gaskell's touching biography, which, with certain minor faults, is still one of the most pathetic records of a melancholy life in our literature. Charlotte Brontë and her sister, according to this account, resembled the sensitive plant exposed to the cutting breezes of the West Riding moors. Their writings were the cry of pain and of only half-triumphant faith, produced by a life-long martyrdom, tempered by mutual sympathy, but embittered by family sorrows and the trials of a dependent life. They afforded one more exemplification of the common theory, that great art is produced by taking an exceptionally delicate nature and mangling it slowly under the grinding wheels of the world.

A recent biographer has given us to understand that this is in great part a misconception, and, whilst paying high compliments to Mrs. Gaskell, he virtually accuses her of unintentionally substituting a fiction for a biography. Mr. Wemyss Reid's intention is excellent; and one can well believe that Mrs. Gaskell did in fact err by carrying into the earlier period the gloom of later years. Most certainly one would gladly believe this to be the case. Only when Mr. Reid seems to think that Charlotte Brontë was a gay and high-spirited girl, and that the people of Haworth were thoroughly commonplace, we begin to fear that we are in the presence of one of those well-meant attempts at whitewashing which "do justice" to a marked character by obliterating all its most prominent features. If Boswell had written in such a spirit, Johnson would have been a Chesterfield, and Goldsmith never have blundered in his talk. When we look at them

fairly, Mr. Reid's proofs seem to be distinctly inadequate for his conclusions, though calculated to correct some very important misconceptions. He quotes, for example, a couple of letters, in one of which Miss Brontë ends a little outburst of Tory politics by saying, "Now, Ellen, laugh heartily at all that rodomontade!" This sentence, omitted by Mrs. Gaskell, is taken to prove that Charlotte's interest in politics was "not unmingled with the happy levity of youth." Surely, it is just a phrase from the school-girl's "Complete Letter-Writer." It would be as sensible to quote from an orator the phrase, "but I fear that I am wearying the House," to prove that he was conscious of being an intolerable bore. The next letter is said to illustrate the "infinite variety of moods" of her true character, and its rapid transitions from grave to gay, because, whilst expressing very strongly some morbid feelings, she admits that they would be contemptible to common-sense, and says that she had been "in one of her sentimental humours." Did anybody ever express a morbid feeling without some such qualification? And is not "infinite," even in the least mathematical sense, rather a strong expression for two? A sentimental mood and a reaction are mentioned in one letter. That scarcely proves much gaiety of heart or variety of mood. If, indeed, Charlotte had always been at her worst, she would have been mad: and we need not doubt that she too had some taste of the gladness as of the sorrows of childhood. The plain truth is, that Miss Brontë's letters, read without reference to the disputes of rival biographers, are disappointing. The most striking thing about them is that they are young-ladyish. Here and there a passage revealing the writer's literary power shines through the more commonplace matter, but, as a whole, they give a curious impression of immaturity. The explanation seems to be, in the first place, that Miss Brontë, with all her genius, was still a young lady. Her mind, with its exceptional

powers in certain directions, never broke the fetters by which the parson's daughter of the last generation was restricted. Trifling indications of this are common in her novels. The idealised portrait of Emily, the daring and unconventional Shirley, shows her utmost courage by hinting a slight reluctance to repeat certain clauses in the Athanasian Creed; and the energy with which the unlucky curates are satirised shows the state of mind in which even the youngest clergyman is still invested with more or less superhuman attributes. The warmth is generated by the previous assumption that a young gentleman who dons a white neckcloth must, in the normal state of things, put off the school-boy and develop a hidden pair of wings. The wrath excited by their failure to fulfil this expectation strikes one as oddly disproportionate. And, in the next place, it seems that, even in writing to her best friends, Miss Brontë habitually dreaded any vivid expression of feeling, and perhaps observed that her sentiments when spread upon letter-paper had a morbid appearance. There are many people who can confide in the public more freely than in the most intimate friends. The mask of anonymous authorship and fictitious personages has a delusive appearance of security. The most sacred emotions are for ourselves or for the invisible public rather than for the intermediate sphere of concrete spectators. The letters may dissipate some of Mrs. Gaskell's romantic gloom, but they do not persuade us that the Brontës were ever like their neighbours. The doctrine that the people of Haworth were really commonplace mortals may be accepted with a similar reserve. Undoubtedly every Scotch peasant is not a Davie Deans, nor every Irishman a Captain Costigan. There are natives of the mining districts who do not throw half-bricks at every stranger they see; there are Yankees who do not chew tobacco, and Englishmen who do not eat raw beef-steaks. And so one may well

believe that many inhabitants of Haworth would have passed muster at Charing Cross; and one may hope and believe that a man like Heathcliff was an exaggeration even of the most extravagant of the squires in Craven. If there were many such people in any corner of this world, it would be greatly in want of a thorough clearing out. And, therefore, one may understand why the good people of Haworth should be amazed when Mrs. Gaskell set forth as common types the gentleman who fired small-shot from his parlour window at anyone who came within convenient range, and the man who chuckled over his luck in dying just after insuring his life.

But, for all this, it would be permissible also to suppose that there was a strongly marked provincial character in that region, even if Miss Brontë's life-like portraits were not their own sufficient evidence. All people seem to be commonplace to the commonplace observer. Genius reveals the difference; it does not invent it. In one sense, doubtless, the people were commonplace enough, and in that fact lay part of their offensiveness. Many of the upper classes, one may guess, were hard, crabbed men of business, with even less than the average of English toleration for sentiment or æsthetic fancies; and their inferiors were sturdy workmen, capable of taking a pride in their own brutality, which would have shocked gentler races. But the precise degree in which these characteristics were manifested must be left to the decision of local observers. We cannot affect to know accurately in what proportion the charge of originality is to be shared between the Brontës and their neighbours; how far the surroundings were unusually harsh and the surrounded abnormally tender. In any case, one may assume that Miss Brontë and her sisters were at once even morbidly sensitive and exposed to the contact of persons emphatically intolerant of morbid sentiment. Their ordinary relation to the outside world seems to be indicated by one peculiarity of

Miss Brontë's writing. When young Mark Yorke sees that Moore has been flattered by hearing a lady describe him as "not sentimental," that offensive lad gets down a dictionary and endeavours to dash Moore's pleasure by proving that "not sentimental" must mean destitute of ideas. The trait is very probably from life, and is at any rate life-like. There are many amiable people who take a keen pleasure in dashing cold water upon any little manifestation of self-complacency in their neighbours. To find out a man's tenderest corn, and then to bring your heel down upon it with a good rasping scrunch, is somehow gratifying to corrupt human nature. A kindly wit contrives to convey a compliment in affected satire. But the whole aim of a humourist of this variety is to convey the most mortifying truths in the most brutal plain-speaking. Now speeches modelled upon this plan are curiously frequent in Miss Brontë's conversations. Hunsden, the first sketch of the Yorke type in "The Professor," composes his whole talk of a string of brutal home-truths. The worst characters, like Miss Fanshawe in "Villette," thoroughly enjoy telling a friendless governess that she is poor, plain, and sickly. And even her favourites, Rochester Shirley and Paul Emanuel, have just a leaning to the same trick of speech, though with them it is an occasional bitter to heighten the flavour of their substantial kindness. Miss Brontë has as little sense of humour as Milton or Wordsworth; but her nearest approach to it is in some of those shrewd, bitter sayings which are rather more of a gibe than a compliment. When one remembers that the originals of the Yorkes were amongst her most cherished and cultivated friends, and that they are admittedly painted to the life, one may fancy that she had received a good many of those left-handed compliments which seem to have done duty for pleasant jests in the district.

The soliloquies in which her heroines indulge proceed

upon the same plan. Jane Eyre sits in judgment upon herself, and listens to the evidence of Memory and Reason, accusing her of rejecting the real and "rabidly devouring the ideal." And she decides in accordance with her witnesses. "Listen, Jane Eyre, to your sentence; to-morrow place the glass before you and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line; smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, 'Portrait of a governess, disconnected, poor, and plain!'"

Similar passages occur in "Shirley" and "Villette," and obviously represent a familiar mood. The original of this portrait was frequently engaged, it would seem, in forcing herself to hear such unpalatable truths. When other people snubbed her, after the fashion of the Yorkes, she might be vexed by their harshness, but her own thoughts echoed their opinion. Lucy Snowe is rather gratified than otherwise when Miss Fanshawe treats her to one of these pleasing fits of frank thinking aloud. She pardons the want of feeling for the sake of the honesty.

Sensitive natures brought into contact with those of coarser grain may relieve themselves in various ways. Some might have been driven into revolt against the proprieties which found so harsh an expression. The scamp Branwell Brontë took the unluckily commonplace path of escape from a too frigid code of external morality which leads to the public-house. His sisters followed the more characteristically feminine method. They learned to be proud of the fetters by which they were bound. Instead of fretting against the stern law of repression, they identified it with the eternal code of duty, and rejoiced in trampling on their own weakness. The current thus restrained ran all the more powerfully in its narrow channel. What might have been bright and genial sentiment was transformed and chastened into a kind of austere enthusiasm. They became recluses in

spirit, sternly enforcing a self-imposed rule, though, in their case, the convent walls were invisible and the objects of their devotion not those which dominate the ascetic imagination.

Theorists who trace the inheritance of race characteristics might be interested in the curious development thus effected. The father of the family was an Irishman, and the mother a Cornish woman; the aunt, who succeeded her in the management of the household, had a persistent dislike for the character of her northern neighbours; even Charlotte herself, we are told, spoke in her childhood with a strong Irish accent. And yet, as we find her saying in reference to the troubles of 1848, she has "no sympathy" with French or Irish. She had been spiritually annexed by the people with whom she lived. She was obtrusively and emphatically a Yorkshire woman, though only by adoption; she is never tired of proclaiming or implying her hearty preference of rough Yorkshire people to cockneys, sentimentalists, and that large part of the human race which we describe contemptuously as "foreigners." She is a typical example of the "patriotism of the steeple." She loved with her whole heart the narrowest insular type. She idolised the Duke of Wellington, with his grand contempt for humbug and ideas, terms synonymous—perhaps rightly synonymous—with many people. When she came in contact with fine foreigners and Papists, it only increased her hearty contempt for forms of character and religion which, one might have fancied *à priori* would have had many attractions for her. If at times she felt the æsthetic charm of parts of the Catholic system, she was but the more convinced that it was a poison, dangerous in proportion to its sweetness. The habit of trampling on some of her own impulses had become a religion for her. She had learnt to make a shield of reserve and self-repression, and could not be tempted to lay it aside when gentle persuasion took the place of rougher intimidation. Much

is said by her biographers of the heroic force of will of her sister Emily, who presents the same type in an intensified form. Undoubtedly both sisters had powerful wills; but their natures had not less been moulded, and their characters, so to speak, turned inward by the early influence of surrounding circumstances. The force was not of that kind which resists the pressure from without, but of the kind which accepts and intensifies it, and makes a rigid inward law for itself of the law embodied in external conditions.

The sisters, indeed, differed widely, though with a strong resemblance. The iron had not entered so deeply into Charlotte's nature. Emily's naturally subjective mode of thought—to use the unpleasant technical phrase—found its most appropriate utterance in lyrical poetry. She represents, that is, the mood of pure passion, and is rather encumbered than otherwise by the necessity of using the more indirect method of concrete symbols. She feels, rather than observes; whereas Charlotte feels in observing. Charlotte had not that strange self-concentration which made the external world unreal to her sister. Her powers of observation, though restricted by circumstances and narrowed by limitations of her intellect, showed amazing penetration within her proper province. The greatest of all her triumphs in this direction is the character of Paul Emanuel, which has tasked Mr. Swinburne's powers of expressing admiration, and which one feels to be, in its way, inimitable. A more charming hero was never drawn, or one whose reality is more vivid and unmistakable. We know him as we know a familiar friend, or rather as we should know a friend whose character had been explained for us by a common acquaintance of unusual acuteness and opportunity of observation. Perhaps we might venture to add, that it is hardly explicable, except as a portrait drawn by a skilful hand guided by love, and by love intensified by the consciousness of some impassable barrier.

Mr. Swinburne compares this masterpiece of Miss Brontë's art with the famous heroes of fiction, Don Quixote, Uncle Toby, and Colonel Newcome. Don Quixote admittedly stands apart as one of the greatest creations of poetic imagination. Of Colonel Newcome I will not speak; but the comparison with Uncle Toby is enough to suggest what is the great secret both of Miss Brontë's success and its limitations. In one sense Paul Emanuel is superior even to such characters as these. He is more real: he is so real that we feel at once that he must have been drawn from a living model, though we may leave some indefinable margin of idealisation. If the merit of fiction were simply its approach to producing illusion, we might infer that Paul Emanuel was one of the first characters in the world of fiction. But such a test admittedly implies an erroneous theory of art; and, in fact, the intense individuality of Paul Emanuel is, in a different sense, the most serious objection to him. He is a real human being who gave lectures at a particular date in a *pension* at Brussels. We are as much convinced of that fact as we are of the reality of Miss Brontë herself; but the fact is also a presumption that he is not one of those great typical characters, the creation of which is the highest triumph of the dramatist or novelist. There is too much of the temporary and accidental—too little of the permanent and essential.

We all know and love Uncle Toby, but we feel quite sure that no such man ever existed except in Sterne's brain. There may have been some real being who vaguely suggested him; but he is, we assume, the creation of Sterne, and the projection into concrete form of certain ideas which had affected Sterne's imagination. He is not, indeed, nor is any fictitious character, a creation out of nothing. Partly, no doubt, he is Sterne himself, or Sterne in a particular mood; but Uncle Toby's soul, that which makes him live and excite our sympathy and love, is

something which might be expressed by the philosopher as a theory, and which has been expressed in an outward symbol by an artist of extraordinary skill. Don Quixote is of perennial interest, because he is the most powerful type ever set forth of the contrast between the ideal and the commonplace, and his figure comes before us whenever we are forced to meditate upon some of the most vital and most melancholy truths about human life. Uncle Toby, in a less degree, is a great creation, because he is the embodiment of one answer to a profound and enduring problem. He represents, it has been said, the wisdom of love, as Mr. Shandy exemplifies the love of wisdom. More precisely, he is an incarnation of the sentimentalism of the eighteenth century. It is a phenomenon which has its bad and its good side, and which may be analysed and explained by historians of the time. Sterne, in describing Uncle Toby, gave a concrete symbol for one of the most important currents of thought of the time, which took religious, moral, and political, as well as artistic shapes. In many ways the sentiment has lost much of its interest for us; but though an utterance of an imperfect doctrine, we may infer that Uncle Toby's soul will transmigrate into new shapes, and perhaps develop into higher forms.

When we measure M. Paul Emanuel by this test, we feel instinctively that there is something wanting. The most obvious contrast is that M. Emanuel is no humourist himself, nor even a product of humour. The imperfections, the lovable absurdities, of Uncle Toby are imbedded in the structure of his character. His whims and oddities always leave us in the appropriate mood of blended smiles and tears. Many people, especially "earnest" young ladies, will prefer M. Paul Emanuel, who, like his creator, is always in deadly earnest. At bottom he is always (like all ladies' heroes) a true woman, simple, pure, heroic and loving—a real Joan of Arc, as Mr. Thackeray said of

his creator, in the beard and blouse of a French professor. He attaches extravagant importance to trifles, indeed, for his irascible and impetuous temperament is always converting him into an Æolus of the duck-pond. So far there is, we may admit, a kind of pseudo-humorous element in his composition; but the humour, such as it is, lies entirely on the surface. He is perfectly sane and sensible, though a trifle choleric. Give him a larger sphere of action, and his impetuosity will be imposing instead of absurd. It is the mere accident of situation which gives, even for a moment, a ludicrous tinge to his proceedings.

Uncle Toby, on the contrary, would be even more of a humourist as a general on the battle-field than in his mimic sieges on the bowling-green. The humour is in his very marrow, not in his surroundings; and the reason is that Sterne feels what every genuine humourist feels, and what, indeed, it is his main function to express—a strong sense of the irony of fate, of the queer mixture of good and bad, of the heroic and the ludicrous, of this world of ours, and of what we may call the perversity of things in general. Whether such a treatment is altogether right and healthy is another question; and most certainly Sterne's view of life is in many respects not only unworthy, but positively base. But it remains true that the deep humourist is finding a voice for one of the most pervading and profound of the sentiments raised in a philosophical observer who is struck by the discords of the universe. Sensitiveness to such discords is one of the marks of a truly reflective intellect, though a humourist suggests one mode of escape from the pain which they cause, whilst a philosophic and religious mind may find another and perhaps a more profound solution.

Now M. Paul Emanuel, admirable and amiable as he is, never carries us into the higher regions of thought. We are told, even ostentatiously, of the narrow prejudices which he shares, though they do not make him harsh and

uncharitable. The prejudices were obvious in this case to the creator, because her own happened to be of a different kind. The "Tory and clergyman's daughter" was rather puzzled by finding that a bigoted Papist with a Jesuit education might still be a good man, and points out conscientiously the defects which she ascribes to his early training. But the mere fact of the narrowness, the want of familiarity with a wider sphere of thought, the acceptance of a narrow code of belief and morality, does not strike her as in itself having either a comic or a melancholy side. M. Paul has the wrong set of prejudices, but is not as wrong as prejudiced; and therefore we feel that a Sterne, or, say, a George Sand, whilst doing equal justice to M. Emanuel's excellent qualities, would have had a feeling (which in her was altogether wanting) of his limitation and his incongruity with the great system of the world. Seen from an intellectual point of view, placed in his due relation to the great currents of thought and feeling of the time, we should have been made to feel the pathetic and humorous aspects of M. Emanuel's character, and he might have been equally a living individual and yet a type of some more general idea. The philosopher might ask, for example, what is the exact value of unselfish heroism guided by narrow theories or employed on unworthy tasks; and the philosophic humourist or artist might embody the answer in a portrait of M. Emanuel considered from a cosmic or a cosmopolitan point of view. From the lower standpoint accessible to Miss Brontë he is still most attractive; but we see only his relations to the little scholastic circle, and have no such perception as the greatest writers would give us of his relations to the universe, or, as the next order would give, of his relations to the great world without.

Although the secret of Miss Brontë's power lies, to a great extent, in the singular force with which she can reproduce acute observations of character from without,

her most esoteric teaching, the most accurate reflex from her familiar idiosyncrasy, is of course to be found in the characters painted from within. We may infer her personality more or less accurately from the mode in which she contemplates her neighbours, but it is directly manifested in various avatars of her own spirit. Among the characters who are more or less mouthpieces of her peculiar sentiment we may reckon not only Lucy Snowe and Jane Eyre, but, to some extent, Shirley, and, even more decidedly, Rochester. When they speak we are really listening to her own voice, though it is more or less disguised in conformity to dramatic necessity. There are great differences between them; but they are such differences as would exist between members of the same family, or might be explained by change of health or internal circumstances. Jane Eyre has not had such bitter experience as Lucy Snowe; Shirley is generally Jane Eyre in high spirits, and freed from harassing anxiety; and Rochester is really a spirited sister of Shirley's, though he does his very best to be a man, and even an unusually masculine specimen of his sex.

Mr. Rochester, indeed, has imposed upon a good many people; and he is probably responsible in part for some of the muscular heroes who have appeared since his time in the world of fiction. I must, however, admit that, in spite of some opposing authority, he does not appear to me to be a real character at all, except as a reflection of a certain side of his creator. He is in reality the personification of a true woman's longing (may one say it now?) for a strong master. But the knowledge is wanting. He is a very bold but necessarily unsuccessful attempt at an impossibility. The parson's daughter did not really know anything about the class of which he is supposed to be a type, and he remains vague and inconsistent in spite of all his vigour. He is intended to be a person who has surfeited from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and addresses the

inexperienced governess from the height—or depth—of his worldly wisdom. And he really knows just as little of the world as she does. He has to impose upon her by giving an account of his adventures taken from the first novel at hand of the early Bulwer school, or a diluted recollection of Byron. There is not a trace of real cynicism—of the strong nature turned sour by experience—in his whole conversation. He is supposed to be specially simple and masculine, and yet he is as self-conscious as a young lady on her first appearance in society, and can do nothing but discourse about his feelings, and his looks, and his phrenological symptoms, to his admiring hearer. Set him beside any man's character of a man and one feels at once that he has no real solidity or vitality in him. He has, of course, strong nerves and muscles, but those are articles which can be supplied in unlimited quantities with little expense to the imagination. Nor can one deny that his conduct to Miss Eyre is abominable. If he had proposed to her to ignore the existence of the mad Mrs. Rochester, he would have acted like a rake, but not like a sneak. But the attempt to entrap Jane into a bigamous connection by concealing the wife's existence is a piece of treachery for which it is hard to forgive him. When he challenges the lawyer and the clergyman to condemn him after putting themselves in his place, their answer is surely obvious. One may take a lenient view of a man who chooses by his own will to annul his marriage to a filthy lunatic; but he was a knave for trying to entrap a defenceless girl by a mock ceremony. He puts himself in a position in which the contemptible Mr. Mason has a moral advantage.

This is by far the worst blot in Miss Brontë's work, and may partly explain, though it cannot justify, the harsh criticisms made at the time. It is easy now to win a cheap reputation for generosity by trampling upon

the dead bodies of the luckless critics who blundered so hopelessly. The time for anger is past; and mere oblivion is the fittest doom for such offenders. Inexperience, and consequently inadequate appreciation of the demands of the situation, was Miss Brontë's chief fault in this matter, and most certainly not any want of true purity and moral elevation. But the fact that she, in whom an instinctive nobility of spirit is, perhaps, the most marked characteristic, should have given scandal to the respectable, is suggestive of another inference. What, in fact, is the true significance of this singular strain of thought and feeling, which puts on various and yet closely-allied forms in the three remarkable novels we have been considering? It displays itself at one moment in some vivid description, or—for "description" seems too faint a word—some forcible presentation to our mind's eye of a fragment of moorland scenery; at another, it appears as an ardently sympathetic portrayal of some trait of character at once vigorous and tender; then it utters itself in a passionate soliloquy, which establishes the fact that its author possessed the proverbial claim to knowledge of the heavenly powers; or again, it produces one of those singular little prose-poems—such as Shirley's description of Eve—which, with all their force, have just enough flavour of the "devoirs" at M. Heger's establishment to suggest that they are the work of an inspired school-girl. To gather up into a single formula the meaning of such a character as Lucy Snowe, or, in other words, of Charlotte Brontë, is, of course, impossible. But at least such utterances always give us the impression of a fiery soul imprisoned in too narrow and too frail a tenement. The fire is pure and intense. It is kindled in a nature intensely emotional, and yet aided by an heroic sense of duty. The imprisonment is not merely that of a feeble body in uncongenial regions, but that of a narrow circle of thought, and consequently of a mind which has never worked itself clear

by reflection, or developed an harmonious and consistent view of life. There is a certain feverish disquiet which is marked by the peculiar mannerism of the style. At its best, we have admirable flashes of vivid expression, where the material of language is the incarnation of keen intuitive thought. At its worst, it is strangely contorted, crowded by rather awkward personifications, and degenerates towards a rather unpleasant Ossianesque. More severity of taste would increase the power by restraining the abuse. We feel an aspiration after more than can be accomplished, an unsatisfied yearning for potent excitement, which is sometimes more fretful than forcible.

The symptoms are significant of the pervading flaw in otherwise most effective workmanship. They imply what, in a scientific sense, would be an inconsistent theory, and, in an æsthetic sense, an inharmonious representation of life. One great aim of the writing, explained in the preface to the second edition of "Jane Eyre," is a protest against conventionality. But the protest is combined with a most unflinching adherence to the proper conventions of society; and we are left in great doubt as to where the line ought to be drawn. Where does the unlawful pressure of society upon the individual begin, and what are the demands which it may rightfully make upon our respect? At one moment in "Jane Eyre" we seem to be drifting towards the solution that strong passion is the one really good thing in the world, and that all human conventions which oppose it should be disregarded. This was the tendency which shocked the respectable reviewers of the time. Of course they should have seen that the strongest sympathy of the author goes with the heroic self-conquest of the heroine under temptation. She triumphs at the cost of a determined self-sacrifice, and undoubtedly we are meant to sympathise with the martyr. Yet it is

also true that we are left with the sense of an unsolved discord. Sheer stoical regard for duty is represented as something repulsive, however imposing, in the figure of St. John Rivers, and virtue is rewarded by the arbitrary removal of the obstacles which made it unpleasant. What would Jane Eyre have done, and what would our sympathies have been, had she found that Mrs. Rochester had not been burnt in the fire at Thornfield? That is rather an awkward question. Duty is supreme, seems to be the moral of the story; but duty sometimes involves a strain almost too hard for mortal faculties.

If in the conflict between duty and passion the good so often borders upon the impracticable, the greatest blessing in the world should be a will powerful enough to be an inflexible law for itself under all pressure of circumstances. Even a will directed to evil purposes has a kind of royal prerogative, and we may rightly do it homage. That seems to be the seminal thought in "Wuthering Heights," that strange book to which we can hardly find a parallel in our literature, unless in such works as the "Revenger's Tragedy," and some other crude but startling productions of the Elizabethan dramatists. But Emily Brontë's feeble grasp of external facts makes her book a kind of baseless nightmare, which we read with wonder and with distressing curiosity, but with even more pain than pleasure or profit. Charlotte's mode of conceiving the problem is given most fully in "Villette," the book of which one can hardly say, with a recent critic, that it represents her "ripest wisdom," but which seems to give her best solution of the great problem of life. Wisdom, in fact, is not the word to apply to a state of mind which seems to be radically inconsistent and tentative. The spontaneous and intense affection of kindred and noble natures is the one really precious thing in life, it seems to say; and, so far, the

thought is true, or a partial aspect of the truth; and the high feeling undeniable. But then, the author seems to add, such happiness is all but chimerical. It falls to the lot only of a few exceptional people, upon whom fortune or Providence has delighted to shower its gifts. To all others life is either a wretched grovelling business, an affair of making money and gratifying sensuality, or else it is a prolonged martyrdom. Yield to your feelings, and the chances are enormously great that you are trampled upon by the selfish, or that you come into collision with some of those conventions which must be venerated, for they are the only barriers against moral degradation, and which yet somehow seem to make in favour of the cruel and the self-seeking. The only safe plan is that of the lady in the ballad, to "lock your heart in a case of gold, and pin it with a silver pin." Mortify your affections, scourge yourself with rods, and sit in sackcloth and ashes; stamp vigorously upon the cruel thorns that strew your pathway, and learn not to shrink, when they lacerate the most tender flesh. Be an ascetic, in brief, and yet without the true aim of the ascetic. For, unlike him, you must admit that these affections are precisely the best part of you, and that the offers of the Church, which proposes to wean you from the world and reward you by a loftier prize, are a delusion and a snare. They are the lessons of a designing priesthood, and imply a blasphemy against the most divine instincts of human nature.

This is the unhappy discord which runs through Miss Brontë's conceptions of life, and, whilst it gives an indescribable pathos to many pages, leaves us with a sense of something morbid and unsatisfactory. She seems to be turning for relief alternately to different teachers, to the promptings of her own heart, to the precepts of those whom she has been taught to revere, and occasionally, though timidly and tentatively, to

alien schools of thought. The attitude of mind is, indeed, best indicated by the story (a true story, like most of her incidents) of her visit to the confessional in Brussels. Had she been a Catholic, or a Positivist, or a rebel against all the creeds, she might have reached some consistency of doctrine, and therefore some harmony of design. As it is, she seems to be under a desire which makes her restless and unhappy, because her best impulses are continually warring against each other. She is between the opposite poles of duty and happiness, and cannot see how to reconcile their claims, or even—for perhaps no one can solve that or any other great problem exhaustively—how distinctly to state the question at issue. She pursues one path energetically, till she feels herself to be in danger, and then shrinks with a kind of instinctive dread, and resolves not only that life is a mystery, but that happiness must be sought by courting misery. Undoubtedly such a position speaks of a mind diseased, and a more powerful intellect would even under her conditions have worked out some more comprehensible and harmonious solution.

For us, however, it is allowable to interpret her complaints in our own fashion, whatever it may be. We may give our own answer to the dark problem, or at least indicate the path by which an answer must be reached. For a poor soul so grievously beset within and without by troubles in which we all have a share, we can but feel the strongest sympathy. We cannot sit at her feet as a great teacher, nor admit that her view of life is satisfactory, or even intelligible. But we feel for her as for a fellow-sufferer who has at least felt with extraordinary keenness the sorrows and disappointments which torture most cruelly the most noble virtues, and has clung throughout her troubles to beliefs which must in some form or other be the guiding lights of all worthy actions. She is not in the highest rank amongst

those who have fought their way to a clearer atmosphere, and can help us to clearer conceptions; but she is among the first of those who have felt the necessity of consolation, and therefore been stimulated to more successful efforts.

CHARLES KINGSLEY

The recently published Memorials of the late Canon Kingsley do not constitute a biography of the normal type. In other words, the book does not profess to answer every question which the curiosity of readers might suggest; and, on the whole, one may be very glad that it does not. To many such questions the most appropriate answer is silence, not unmixed with contempt. To others, which may be taken as the expression of a legitimate interest in an eminent man, a reader of moderate intelligence may be trusted to find a sufficient answer in the ample materials placed before him. There is no great difficulty in seizing the main outlines of so strongly marked a character; and, on the whole, Kingsley well deserves the labour. Few writers of his generation gave clearer indications of power. Had he died at the age of five-and-thirty (when "Westward Ho!" was already completed), we should have speculated upon the great things which we had lost. The last twenty years of his life added little or nothing to his literary reputation. Perhaps, indeed, some of his performances—the lectures at Cambridge, and the unfortunate controversy with Newman—reflected a certain discredit upon his previous achievements. The explanation is not far to seek, when one has read the story of his life; but the fact makes it rather difficult to recall the feelings with which the rising generation of the years between 1848 and 1855 regarded the most vigorous champion of a school then in its highest vigour. The "Saint's Tragedy," "Yeast," "Alton Locke,"

"Hypatia," and "Westward Ho!" did not exactly reveal one of the born leaders of mankind; but their freshness, geniality, and vigour seemed to indicate powers which might qualify their possessor to be an admirable interpreter between the original prophets and the inferior disciples. There was the buoyancy of spirit, the undoubting confidence that the riddle of the universe had at last been satisfactorily solved, and the power of seizing the picturesque and striking aspect of things and embodying abstract theories in vivid symbols which marks the second order of intellects—the men who spread but do not originate fruitful and transforming ideas. Thinkers of the highest rank may be equally self-confident: for it cannot be denied that unreasonable trust in one's own infallibility is a great condition of success in even the highest tasks; but the confidence of great minds is compatible with a deeper estimate of the difficulties before them. They may hold that evil will be extirpated, but they are aware that its roots strike down into the very heart of things. Kingsley's exuberant faith in his own message showed the high spirits of youth rather than a profound insight into the conditions of the great problems which he solved so fluently. At the time, however, this youthful zeal was contagious. If not an authority to obey, he was a fellow-worker in whom to trust heartily and rejoice unreservedly. Nobody, as Matthew Arnold says in a letter published in the Life, was more willing to admire or more free from petty jealousies. This quality gave a charm to his writings. There was always something generous in their tone; a desire to understand his antagonist's position, which was due to his own temperament as must as to the teaching of his leader, Maurice; and, in short, a warmth and heartiness which led one to overlook many defects, and rightly attracted the enthusiasm of men young enough to look up to him for guidance.

The earlier pages in Mrs. Kingsley's volumes give a vivid picture of this period of his life, or at least of one side of it. Something is said—as of course it is proper to say something—of the speculative doubts and difficulties through which he won his way to a more settled and happier frame of mind. But it is impossible to take this very seriously. Kingsley, as his letters prove, started in life, like other lads, with a ready-made theory of the universe. Like other lads, he was perfectly confident that it rested upon an unassailable basis and would solve all difficulties. He intended, it is true, to perfect himself in a few branches of study which he had hitherto neglected; he was to learn something about metaphysics, theology, ecclesiastical history, and other branches of knowledge; but it is quite plain that Kant and Augustine and other great teachers of mankind were to be called in, not to consult upon the basis of his philosophy, but to furnish him with a few tools for polishing certain corollaries and increasing his dialectical skill. He is quite ready to provide his correspondents immediately with a definitive philosophical system, and shows his usual versatility in applying at least some of the metaphysical phraseology caught from his intellectual idols. Many lads learn to modify the speculative apparatus with which they started in life. Absolute conversions, it is true, are almost unknown in philosophy. No one ever deserts from the empirical to the *à priori* school, or *vice versâ;* for a man's attitude in such matters depends upon intellectual tendencies which assert themselves in early youth as much as in riper years. But men of real power go through a process of development, which, though it leaves a certain homogeneity between their earlier and their later views, softens the crudeness and lessens the superficiality of the first guesses. No such process is traceable in Kingsley. His first theory is his last, except that in later years his interest in abstract speculation had obviously declined, and his declarations,

if equally dogmatic in form, show less confidence than desire to be confident. He is glad to turn from speculations to facts, and thinks that his strength lies in the direction rather of the natural sciences than of speculative thought.

Probably he was quite right. It would, at any rate, be a mistake to regard any process of speculative development as determining his career. He was no real philosopher, though capable of providing philosophical dialogues quite good enough to figure in an historical novel. He was primarily a poet, or, at least, a man swayed by the imagination and emotions. He felt keenly, saw vividly, and accepted such abstract teachings as were most congenial to his modes of seeing and feeling. The true key to his mental development must therefore be sought in his emotional history, and not in the intellectual fermentation which determines the career of a true thinker. The story of his life in this aspect, though indicated rather than directly told, seems to be simple enough. Few people, it is probable, possess greater faculties of enjoyment than Kingsley. His delight in a fine landscape resembled the delight of an epicure in an exquisite vintage. It had the intensity and absorbing power of a sensual appetite. He enjoyed the sight of the Atlantic rollers relieved against a purple stretch of heather as the conventional alderman enjoys turtle-soup. He gave himself up to the pure emotion as a luxurious nature abandons itself to physical gratification. His was not the contemplative mood of the greater poets of nature, but an intense spasm of sympathy which rather excluded all further reflection. Such a temperament implies equal powers of appreciation for many other kinds of beauty, though his love of fine scenery has perhaps left the strongest mark upon his books. He was abnormally sensitive to those pleasures which are on the border-line between the sensuous and the intellectual. He speaks in an early letter of the "dreamy days of boyhood," when his "enjoyment was drawn from the semi-sensual delights of

ear and eye, from sun and stars, wood and wave, the beautiful inanimate in all its forms." "Present enjoyment," he adds, "present profit, brought always to me a recklessness of moral consequences which has been my bane." The last expression must of course be taken for what it is worth—that is, for next to nothing: but he is no doubt right in attributing to himself a certain greediness of pleasures of the class described, which became more intellectual and comprehensive but hardly less intense in later years.

It is needless to point out what are the dangers to which a man is exposed by such a temperament. He describes himself (at the age of twenty-two) as saved from "the darkling tempests of scepticism," and from "sensuality and dissipation;" saved, too, "from a hunter's life on the prairies, from becoming a savage and perhaps worse." The phrase savours of his habitual exaggeration, but it has a real meaning. Young men with a strong taste for pleasure are ruined often enough, though they do not go so far as "the prairies" to effect that consummation. We can see with sufficient clearness that during his college life Kingsley went through serious struggles and came out victorious. Partly, no doubt, he owed that victory over himself to the fact that his tastes, however keen, were not coarse. He had a genuine vein of poetry; that is to say, of really noble feeling. His intense delight in the higher forms of beauty was a force which resisted any easy lapse into degradation. The æsthetic faculties may, as has been too clearly proved, fall into bondage to the lowest impulses of our nature. In the case of a man so open to generous and manly impulses, so appreciative of the charms which outward scenery reveals to healthy and tender minds and to them alone, the struggle against such a bondage must have been in any case prolonged and vigorous. But stronger men than Kingsley have yielded, and one may see in him the type

of character which, under other conditions, produces the "diabolical" or rather the animalistic school of art and literature. An external influence, we are left to infer, had a share in saving him from so lamentable a descent. Kingsley, in short, was rescued, as other men have been rescued, by the elevating influence of a noble passion. It is inevitable that this fact, tolerably obvious as it is, should be rather indicated than stated in the biography. But he was not slow to proclaim in all his writings, and we need not scruple to assume that his utterance was drawn from his own experience, that, of all good things that can befall a man in this world, the best is that he should fall in love with a good woman. It is not a new truth; indeed, most truths of that importance have an uncomfortable habit of revealing themselves to the intrusive persons who have insisted upon saying all our best things before us. Still, true as it is, many young men are apt to ignore it, or to consider it as repealed instead of limited by obvious prudential maxims. Kingsley, led to recognise it, and even to exaggerate its exclusive importance by his own history, insists upon it with an emphasis which may not only be traced through his writings, but which seems to have affected all his conceptions of life. It may almost be regarded as the true central point of his doctrine. The love of man for woman, when sanctified by religious feeling, is, according to him, the greatest of all forces that work for individual or social good. This belief, and the system of which it forms a part, gives the most characteristic colouring to all his work. It appears to be decided by general consent that a novel means the same thing as a love-story. Some writers, indeed, have been bold enough to maintain, and even to act upon the opinion, that this view exaggerates the part played by the passion in actual life; and that men have some interests in life which survive the pairing period. Kingsley's doctrine differs from that of the ordinary

novelist in another way. Love may not be the ultimate end of a man's life; but it is, as Shakespeare puts it—

> The ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> It is the star to every wandering bark
> Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

It is the guide to a noble life; and not only affords the discipline by which men obtain the mastery over themselves, but reveals to them the true theory of their relations to the universe. This doctrine, treated in a rather vacillating manner, supplies the theme for his earliest book, the "Saint's Tragedy." Lancelot in "Yeast," and even the poor tailor, Alton Locke, owe their best stimulus towards obtaining a satisfactory solution of the perplexed social problems of the time to their love for good women. Hypatia, the type of the feminine influence whose lofty instincts are misdirected by a decaying philosophy, and poor Pelagia, with no philosophy at all, excite the passions by which monks, pagans, and Goths are elevated or corrupted; and the excellent Victoria—a lady who comes too distinctly from a modern tract—shows the philosopher Raphael how to escape from a despairing cynicism. The Elizabethan heroes of "Westward Ho!" take the side of good or evil according to their mode of understanding love for the heroines. In "Two Years Ago," the delicate curate, and the dandified American, and the sturdy Tom Thurnall, all manage to save their souls by the worship of a lofty feminine character, whilst poor Tom Briggs *alias* Vavasour is ruined by his failure to appreciate the rare excellence of his wife. The same thought inspires some of his most remarkable poems, as the truly beautiful "Andromeda," and the "Martyrdom of Saint Maura," considered by himself to be his best, though I fancy that few readers will share this judgment. Lancelot in "Yeast" designs a great allegorical drawing called the

"Triumph of Woman," which sets forth the hallowing influence of feminine charms upon every variety of human being. The picture is one of those which could hardly be put upon canvas; but it would be the proper frontispiece to Kingsley's works.

Such a doctrine, it may be said, is too specific and narrow to be considered as the animating principle of the various books in which it appears. This is doubtless true, and it must be taken rather as the most characteristic application of the teaching of which it is in a logical sense the corollary, though ostensible corollaries are often in fact first principles. When generalised or associated with congenial theories of wider application, it explains Kingsley's leading doctrines. Thus the love of good women is the great practical guide in life; and, in a broader sense, our affections are to guide our intellects. The love of nature, the rapture produced in a sensitive mind by the glorious beauties of the external world, is to teach us the true theory of the universe. The ultimate argument which convinces men like Tom Thurnall and Raphael Aben Ezra is that the love of which they have come to know the mysterious charm must reveal the true archetype of the world, previously hidden by the veil of sense. It wants no more to explain a problem which seems[1] to have puzzled Kingsley himself—why, namely, the mystics should supply the only religious teaching which had "any real meaning for his heart." A man who systematically sees the world through his affections is so far a mystic; though Kingsley's love of the concrete and incapacity for abstract metaphysics prevented him from using the true mystical language. Still simpler is the solution of another problem stated by his biographer. It is said to be "strange" that Kingsley should have acknowledged the intellectual leadership at once of Coleridge and Maurice and of Carlyle. The superficial

[1] *Life*, vol. i. p. 420.

difference between the two first and the last of those writers is indeed obvious. But it requires no profound reasoner to detect the fundamental similarity. They all agree in seeing facts through the medium of the imagination, and substituting poetic intuition for the slow and chilling processes of scientific reasoning. They agree in rejecting the rigid framework of dogma and desiring to exalt the spirit above the dead letter. To Kingsley, as to his teachers, and to most imaginative minds, science seemed at one time to mean materialism in philosophy and cynicism in morals. Men of science subordinate the satisfaction of the emotions to the satisfaction of the intellect; they seek to analyse into their elements the concrete realities which alone interest the poet, and see mechanical laws where their opponents would recognise a living force. To Kingsley they appeared to be drying up the source of his most rapturous emotions, and reducing the beautiful world to a colourless museum of dead specimens. Instead of regulating they were suppressing the emotions. It is less remarkable that he should have opposed a doctrine thus interpreted, than that he should have gradually become less hostile to the scientific aspect of things. He accepted, instead of reviling, Darwin's teaching; and seems to have been convincing himself that, after all, science was not an enemy to the loftier sentiments. His keen eye for nature, his love of beast and bird and insect, made him sympathise with the observers, if not with the reasoners, and led him to recognise a poetic and a religious side in rightly interpreted science.

His antipathy to another kind of dogmatism is equally intelligible. To him it appeared (rightly or wrongly) to be hopelessly tainted by the evil principle which he generally described as Manichæism. It ordered him (or so he supposed) to look upon nature with horror or suspicion, instead of regarding it as everywhere marked with the

indelible impress of the creative hand, and therefore calculated to stimulate the highest emotions of reverence and awe; and, still more, it set up a false and attenuated ethical standard, which condemned all natural impulses as therefore bad, and placed the monkish above the domestic virtues. It was clearly inevitable that a man who regarded human love as the very centre and starting-point of all the good influences of life, and the delight in nature as the very test of a healthily constituted mind, should look upon teaching thus understood with absolute detestation. Possibly he caricatured it; at any rate he spared no pains to attack it by every means open to him, and especially by setting forth his own ideal of character. He created the "muscular Christian"—the man, that is, who, on the showing of his antagonists, is an impossible combination of classical and Christian types, and, on his own, implies the harmonious blending of all aspects of the truth. He protested, fruitlessly enough, against the nickname, because it seemed to imply that his version of the character subordinated the highest to the lowest elements. It suggested that he had used Christian phraseology to consecrate a blind admiration for physical prowess and excess of animal vigour. His indignation—expressed in an imprudently angry letter to one of his critics—was intelligible enough. The imputation was cruel, because it was at once false and plausible. It was false, for Kingsley's ideal heroes—whether properly to be called Christians or not—are certainly not mere animals. They have their faults, but they are not sensual or cynical, though in some of their literary descendants the animal side of their nature seems to have developed itself with suspicious facility. Amyas Leigh would probably have hanged his Guy Livingstone from a yard-arm before the voyage was over. To readers, however, looking at Amyas from a different point of view, the likeness might be deceptive; and in asserting the value of certain qualities too much

depreciated by his critics, he naturally seemed to give them an excessive value.

A vague impression that Kingsley was somehow a potential defender of the faith—that he had seen through the doubts and difficulties which perplex other minds—counts for something in his popularity. It is quite needless to dispel this pleasant vision, if anybody holds it; but I shall venture to take it for granted that it would be useless to look to him for any very profound statement of the grounds of belief. Doubtless he was what is called a sincere believer; but one cannot forget that all hagiologists are apt unconsciously to heighten the halo of religious unction which surrounded their heroes when alive. Kingsley did not carry so much of the pulpit frame of mind into ordinary life as innocent readers might fancy. Nobody would have been better pleased to follow jolly Bishop Corbet into his cellar and pitch away cassock and bands with "There goes the parson," and "There goes the bishop." He had not the dignified calm which stamps the caste of bores and philosophers: and, indeed, the impetuosity of temperament which disqualified him for such tasks is but too perceptible in his artistic work. Its most obvious fault is a want of repose and harmony. He can never be quiet for a moment. Every sentence must be emphatic and intense. He seizes the first aspect of a subject; dashes out a picture—sometimes of perfectly admirable vigour—in half-a-dozen lines; but cannot dwell upon a particular strain of thought or tone down the brilliant hues of fragmentary passages by the diffused atmosphere of calm reflection. He could hardly sit quiet for a moment, as one of his admirers tells us; and his strong-minded heroes, who ought to be self-sustained and tranquil, are always in as great a fever as himself. The result of this tendency is too plainly written upon his life as upon his books. He was always, in a sanitary sense, living upon his capital, and taking more out of his strength

than his powers justified. He knocked himself up completely by writing "Yeast" before he was thirty, and every subsequent work seems to have involved an effort which told heavily upon his constitution. The natural consequence of such a process is to be seen in the fact already noticed that his literary productiveness rapidly declined; and that in his later works we have the emphasis which has become habitual without the force which saved it from affectation. It must, however, be said to his credit that he had the merit—a lamentably rare one—of abandoning the attempt to rival his own earlier performances when the vein no longer flowed spontaneously.

The strength and the weakness of such a temperament are illustrated by his poetry, of which some fragments will probably survive (and few, indeed, are the poets who survive by more than fragments), though we may doubt the truth of his own opinion that they would supply his most lasting claim upon posterity. He explains, however, very frankly why he can never be a great poet. He is wanting, he says,[1] in the great poetic faculty—the "power of metaphor and analogue—the instinctive vision of connections between all things in heaven and earth." His mind, in other words, was deficient in the direction of philosophic imagination. He could not, like Milton, converse habitually with

> Him that yon soars on golden wing,
> Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,
> The cherub Contemplation.

He was too restless and impetuous to be at ease on those heights from which alone the widest truths become perceptible and excite the emotions which are at once deepest and calmest. His songs represent jets and gushes of vivid but rather feverish emotion. A pathetic or heroic story,

1 *Life*, vol. ii. p. 55.

or the beauty of some natural scene, moves him deeply, and he utters his emotion in an energetic burst of vivid language. But he is too short-winged for a long flight, or for soaring into the loftiest regions of the intellectual atmosphere.

Every short lyric is the record, one must suppose, of some such mood of intense excitement. But it makes all the difference whether the excitement takes place in a mind already stored with thought, and ready to pierce instantaneously to the deepest meaning of a particular scene or incident, or in a mind incapable of sustained reflection, and accustomed to see things by brilliant flashes which reveal only their partial and superficial aspects. When, however, we do not blame Kingsley for not being somebody else, we must admit him to be excellent within his limits. The "Andromeda" is in every way admirable. It is probably the most successful attempt in the language to grapple with the technical difficulties of English hexameters; and he also seems to find in the Pagan mythology a more appropriate symbol for his characteristic tone of sentiment, and an imagery which fits in better with his nature-worship than in regions more familiar to him. He can abandon himself unreservedly to his delight in the beautiful without bothering himself about the Manichees or showing the controversial theologian under the artistic dress. The shorter poems have generally a power of stamping themselves upon the memory, due, no doubt, to their straightforward, nervous style. They have the cardinal merit of vigour which belongs to all genuine utterance of real emotion, and are delightfully free from the flabby affectations of many modern rivals. The mark may not be the most elevated, but he goes at it as straight as he would ride at a fence. His "North-Easter" does not blow from such ethereal regions as Shelley's "South-west Wind." It verges upon the absurd, and is perhaps not quite free from that taint of vulgarity which vitiates

all artistic reference to field-sports. But given that such a sentiment was worth expressing, the tones in which it is couched are as ringing and vigorous as could be wished. He can rise much higher when he is pathetic and indignant. It would not be easy to find a better war-cry for the denouncer of social wrongs than the ballad of the Poacher's Widow. And to pass over the two songs by which he is best known, such poems as "Poor Lorraine" —first published in the biography—or the beautiful lines in the "Saint's Tragedy," beginning, "Oh, that we two were maying!" are intense enough in their utterance to make us wonder why he fell short of the highest class of song-writing. Perhaps the defect is indicated by a certain desire to be picturesque, which prevents him from obtaining complete success in the simple expression of pathos. The poems have a taint of prettiness—and prettiness is a deadly vice in poetry. There is about them a faint flavour of drawing-room music. But, when we do not want to be hypercritical, we may be thankful for poetry which, if not of the highest class, has the rarest of merits at the present day—genuine fervour and originality.

The fullest expression of Kingsley's mind must be found in the works which appeared from 1848 to 1855. Those seven years, one may say, saw his literary rise, culmination, and decline. The "Saint's Tragedy" represents the period of mental agitation. It will hardly live longer than many other modern attempts by men of equal genius to compose dramas not intended for the stage. The form in such cases is generally felt to be an encumbrance rather than a help, and one cannot help thinking in this instance that Kingsley might have done better if he had written a picturesque history instead of forcing his story into an uncongenial framework. Nobody is now likely to share Bunsen's belief that the author had proved himself capable of continuing Shakespeare's great series of historic dramas. But one is also rather surprised that

a performance which, with all its crudities and awkwardness, showed such unmistakable symptoms of power, did not make a greater impression. Perhaps the most vital fault is the want of unity, not merely in plot but in the leading thought, which was the natural result of the mode of composition. He began it in 1842—that is, at the age of twenty-three—and it was not published till 1848. As this includes the period during which Kingsley passed through his acutest trouble, it is not wonderful that the book should show signs of confusion. It has, indeed, a purpose, and a very distinct one. It is the first exposition of that doctrine which, as I have said, Kingsley preached in season and out of season. He wishes to exhibit the beauty of his own ideal of feminine meekness as compared with the monastic and ascetic ideal. It cannot, I think, be denied that this central idea was capable of artistic treatment. A dramatist might surely find an impressive motive in the conflict set up in a mind of purity and elevation by the acceptance of a distorted code of morality. There is a genuine tragic element in this interpretation of poor Elizabeth's sufferings. Nature tells her that her domestic affections are holy and of divine origin; the priests tell her that they are to be crushed and mortified. She is gradually tortured to death by the distraction of attempting to obey the two voices, each of them appealing to the loftiest and most unselfish motives. The history is probably inaccurate, but the conception is not the less powerful. The execution remains unsatisfactory, chiefly for the obvious reason that Kingsley was not quite a Shakespeare nor even a Schiller, and that his work is therefore rather a series of vigorous sketches than an effective whole; but partly also because his own sentiment seems to be vacillating and indistinct. A thorough hater or a thorough adherent of the theories impugned would have made a work more artistically telling because more coherently conceived. Kingsley is really feeling his way

to a theory, and therefore undecided in his artistic attitude. The whole becomes patchy and indistinct. He is feverishly excited rather than deeply moved, and inconsistent when he ought to be compassionate. Briefly, he wants firmness of hand and definiteness of purpose, though there is no want of very remarkable vigour.

The two novels "Yeast" and "Alton Locke" are far more effective; and indeed "Alton Locke" may be fairly regarded as his best piece of work. It is not creditable to the discernment of the intelligent public that Kingsley should have been taken for a subversive revolutionist on the strength of these performances. The intelligent public indeed is much given to the grossest stupidity; and, as Kingsley more or less deceived himself, it is not wonderful that he should have been misunderstood. He announced himself at a public meeting to be a Chartist; and when a man voluntarily adopts a nickname, he must not be surprised if he is credited with all the qualities generally associated with it. In fact, however, he was not more of a genuine Radical than when in later years he declared that he would, if he could, "restore the feudal system, the highest form of civilisation—in ideal, not in practice—which Europe has yet seen."[1] There is much virtue in the phrase "not in practice;" and perhaps Kingsley was no more of a genuine feudalist than he was of a genuine Chartist. In his earlier phase he was simply playing a part which has often enough been attempted by very honest men. Missionaries of a new faith see the advantage of sapping the old creed instead of attacking it in front. Adopting its language and such of its tenets as are congenial to their own, they can gradually introduce a friendly garrison into the hostile fort. The conscious adoption of such a method might have been called jesuitical by Kingsley, and in his mouth such an epithet would have been damnatory. But it was in all sincerity

[1] *Life*, vol. ii. p. 357.

that he and his friends considered themselves to be the "true demagogues"—to quote the title of the chapter in which the moral of "Alton Locke" is embodied. They had not the slightest sympathy, indeed, with the tenets of the thoroughgoing Radical. Kingsley believed in the social as much as in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and with an intensity which almost amounted to bigotry. He would no more put down the squires than the parson; and himself a most energetic parson, he certainly did not undervalue the social importance of the function discharged by his order. In "Alton Locke" the bitterest satire is directed, not against self-indulgent nobles or pedantic prelates, but against the accepted leaders of the artisans. The "true demagogue," as is perfectly natural, holds the false demagogue in especial horror. Kingsley is the friend, not Cuffey. He hates the "Manchester school" as the commonplace version of Radicalism and the analogue of the Materialist school in politics. From these, he says,[1] in 1852, "heaven defend us; for of all narrow, conceited, hypocritical, and anarchic and atheistic schemes of the universe, the Manchester one is precisely the worst. I have no words to express my contempt for it." Briefly, Kingsley's remedy for speculative error was not the rejection, but the more spiritual interpretation, of the old creed; and his remedy for bad squires and parsons was not disendowment and division of the land, but the raising up a better generation of parsons and squires.

There is a superficial resemblance between this theory and that of the Young England school, who, like Kingsley, would have restored the feudal system in a purified state. Some of his writing runs parallel to Lord Beaconsfield's exposition of that doctrine. The difference was, of course, vital. He hated mediæval revivalism as heartily as he hated the demagogues; and his prejudices against the

[1] *Life*, vol. i. p. 314.

whole order of ideas represented by the "Tracts for the Times" were perhaps the strongest of his antipathies. He looked back to the sixteenth, not to the twelfth century; and his ideal parson was to be no ascetic, but a married man with a taste for field-sports, and fully sympathising with the common-sense of the laity. The Young England party seemed to him to desire the conversion of the modern labourer into a picturesque peasant, ready to receive doles at the castle-gate and bow before the priest with bland subservience. Kingsley wanted to make a man of him; to give him self-respect and independence, not in a sense which would imply the levelling all social superiorities, but in the sense of assigning to him an honourable position in the social organisation. He was no more to be petted or pauperised than to be set on a level with his social superiors, or set loose without guidance from his intellectual teachers.

Some such doctrines would be verbally accepted by most men; and I cannot here ask whether they really require the teaching with which Kingsley associated them. The demagogues and the obstructives were both, according to him, on a wrong tack; and he could point out the one true method of reuniting development with order. Whatever the value of his theories, the sentiment associated with them was substantially healthy, vigorous, and elevated. That part of his fictions in which it is embodied is probably his most valuable work. Nobody can read the descriptions of the agricultural labourers or of the London artisan in "Yeast" and "Alton Locke" without recognising both the strength of his sympathies and the vigour of his perceptive faculties. He was drawing from the life, and expressing his deepest emotions. "What is the use of preaching to hungry paupers about heaven?" he asks. "Sir, as my clerk said to me yesterday, there is a weight on their hearts, and they call for no change, for they know they can be no worse off than they are."

The phrase explains what was the curse which rested upon Kingsley's parishioners, and in what sense he had to "redeem it from barbarism." He did his work like a man. He was daily with his people "in their cottages, and made a point of talking to the men and boys at their field-work till he was personally intimate with every soul, from the women at their washtubs to the babies in the cradle, for whom he had always a loving word and look." Whatever we may think of his "socialism" or "democracy," there was at least no want of depth or sincerity in his sympathy for the poor, and therefore there is no false ring in his description of their condition. He writes with his heart—not to serve any political purpose or to gain credit for a cheap display of charitable feeling.

No books can show more forcibly the dark side of English society of the time. The aspect in which Kingsley views the evil is characteristic. The root of all that is good in man lies in the purity and vigour of the domestic affections. A condition of things in which the stability and health of the family become impossible is one in which the very foundations of society are being sapped. Nobody could be more alive to the countless mischiefs implied in the statement that the poor man has nothing deserving the name of home. The verses given to Tregarva in "Yeast" sum up his diagnosis of the social disease with admirable vigour. Many scenes in that rather chaotic story are equally vivid in their presentation of the facts. The description of the village feast is a bit of startlingly impressive realism. The poor sodden, hopeless, spiritless peasantry consoling themselves with strong drink and brutal songs, open to no impressions of beauty, with no sense of the romantic except in lawless passion, and too beaten down to have even a thought of rebellion except in the shape of agrarian outrage, are described with singular force. Poor Crawy, the poacher, scarcely elevated above the beasts, looking to the gaol and

workhouse for his only refuge, so degraded that pity is almost lost in disgust, is the significant product of the general decay. The race is deteriorating. It has fallen vastly below the standard of the last generation. All the lads are "smaller, clumsier, lower-brained, and weaker-jawed than their elders." Such higher feeling as remains takes the form of the dog-like fidelity of Harry Verney, the gamekeeper. Kingsley never wrote a better scene than the death of the old man from a wound received in a poaching affray; when he suddenly springs upright in bed, holds out "his withered paw with a kind of wild majesty," and shouts "There ain't such a head of hares on any manor in the country! And them's the last words of Harry Verney."

"Alton Locke" is a more ambitious and coherent effort; and the descriptions of the London population, and of the futile attempt at a rising in the country, are in the same vigorous vein. Perhaps a more remarkable success is the old Scotchman, Mackaye, who seems to be the best of Kingsley's characters. He has some real humour, a quality in which Kingsley was for the most part curiously deficient; but one must expect that in this case he was drawing from an original. It is interesting to read Carlyle's criticism of this part of the book. "Saunders Mackaye," he says,[1] "my invaluable countryman in this book, is nearly perfect; indeed, I greatly wonder how you did contrive to manage him. His very dialect is as if a native had done it, and the whole existence of the rugged old hero is a wonderfully splendid and coherent piece of Scotch bravura." Perhaps an explanation of the wonder might be suggested to other people more easily than to Carlyle; but, at any rate, Mackaye is a very felicitous centre for the various groups who play their parts in the story; and not the less efficient as a chorus because he is chiefly critical and

[1] *Life*, vol. i. p. 244.

confines himself to shrewd demonstrations of the folly of everybody concerned.

Carlyle gives as his final verdict that his impression is of "a fervid creation still left half chaotic." In fact, with all the genuine force of "Alton Locke"—and no living novelist has excelled the vividness of certain passages—there is an unsatisfactory side to the whole performance. It is marred by the feverishness which inspires most of his work. There is an attempt to crowd too much into the space, and the emphasis sometimes remains when the power is flagging. Greater reserve of power and more attention to unity of effect would have been required to make it a really great book. But the most unsatisfactory part is where the author forgets to be a novelist and becomes a preacher and a pamphleteer. The admirable heroine is forced to deliver what is to all purposes a commonplace tract of two or three chapters at the end of the story, when her thoughts, to be effective, should really have been embedded in the structure of the story. Anybody can preach a sermon when no contradiction is allowed; but the novelist ought to show the thought translated into action, and not given in a raw shape of downright comment. As it is, Lady Ellerton is a mere lay-figure who can talk very edifying phrases, but is really tacked on to the outside of the narrative. The moral should have been evolved by the natural course of events; for when it is presented in this point-blank fashion we begin to cavil, and wish that the Chartist or Mackaye might be allowed to show cause against the sentence pronounced. As they can't, we do it for ourselves.

The historical novels which followed indicate a remarkable change. When he published "Two Years Ago," Kingsley had become reconciled to the world. There is an apparent and decidedly unpleasant inconsistency between the denouncer of social wrongs and the novelist who sings the praises of squires, patrons, and guardsmen,

with a placid conviction that they sufficiently represent his ideal. The explanation is partly that, as I have said, Kingsley never accepted the revolutionary remedy for the grievances which he described. He was quite consistent in regarding the old creed as expressing the true mode of cure. But one must still ask whether the facts had changed. Was the world regenerated between 1848 and 1855? Were English labourers all properly fed, housed, and taught? Had the sanctity of domestic life acquired a new charm in the interval, and was the old quarrel between rich and poor definitely settled or in the way to settlement? That appears to have been Kingsley's own view, if we may judge from the prefaces to later editions of his book; and the great agency to which he assigns the strange improvement was the outbreak of the Crimean war. That crisis, it seems, had taught the higher classes a deeper sense of their responsibility, and roused us from the dangerous slumber of peace and growing wealth. Mr. Herbert Spencer has lately expounded a very different theory as to the results of an increased intensity of the military spirit. Without discussing so wide a question, it may, I fancy, be pretty safely assumed that the future historian will not take quite this view of recent affairs, and will attribute any improvement that may have taken place to some deeper cause than that assigned. When a whole social order is rotting, as the author of "Yeast" supposed ours to have been, it is not often cured by a little splutter of fighting; nor does the belief in the efficacy of such a remedy seem to fit in very well with a spiritual Christianity. Perhaps we may further assume therefore, that the change was rather in the spectator than in the spectacle. If so, Kingsley was not the first man to account for an alteration in his personal outlook by a movement of the rest of the universe. His parish had been got into better order; his combative instinct had grown weaker; and, like other men who grow in years

and domestic comfort, he had become more content with things in general. Fathers of families are capable, we know, of everything, and, amongst other things, of softening the fervour of their early enthusiasms. There is nothing at all strange in the process; but it must be taken to illustrate the fact that, if Kingsley's sympathies were keen, his intellectual insight was not very deep. A man who holds that a social disease is so easily suppressed, has not measured very accurately the constitutional disorder which it revealed.

"Two Years Ago," the book in which this conclusion is plainly announced, is in many respects a painful performance. It contains, indeed, some admirable descriptions of scenery; but the sentiment is poor and fretful. Tom Thurnall, intended to be an embodiment of masculine vigour, has no real stuff in him. He is a bragging, excitable, and at bottom sentimental person. All his swagger fails to convince us that he is a true man. Put beside a really simple and masculine nature like Dandie Dinmont, or even beside Kingsley's own Amyas Leigh, one sees his hollowness. The whole story leads up to a distribution of poetical justice in Kingsley's worst manner. He has a lamentable weakness for taking upon himself the part of Providence. "After all," he once wrote in "Yeast," "your 'Rake's Progress' and 'Atheist's Deathbed' do no more good than noble George Cruikshank's 'Bottle' will, because everyone knows that they are the exception and not the rule; that the atheist generally dies with a conscience as comfortably callous as a rhinoceros-hide; and the rake, when age stops his power of sinning, becomes generally rather more respectable than his neighbours." It is a pity that Kingsley could not remember this true saying in later years. He seems to have grown too impatient to leave room for the natural evolution of events. He gives the machinery a jerk, and is fidgety because the wheels grind so slowly, though they "grind exceeding small."

Between "Alton Locke" and "Two Years Ago" there luckily intervened "Hypatia" and "Westward Ho!" They are brilliant and almost solitary exceptions to the general dreariness of the historical novel. To criticise them either from the historical or the artistic point of view would indeed be easy enough; but they have a vivacity which defies criticism. I have no doubt that "Hypatia" is fundamentally and hopelessly inaccurate, and that a sound historian would shudder at innumerable anachronisms and pick holes in every paragraph. I don't believe that men like the Goths ever existed in this world, and am prepared to give up the whole tribe of monks, pagans, Jews, and fathers of the Church. If "Westward Ho!" is (as I presume) less inaccurate because dealing with less distant ages, it is still too much of a party pamphlet to be taken for history. The Jesuits are probably caricatures, and Miss Ayacanora is a bit of rather silly melodrama. But it is difficult to say too much in favour of the singular animation and movement of both books. There is a want of repose, if you insist upon applying the highest canons of art; but the brilliance of description, the energy and rapidity of the action, simply disarm the reader. I rejoice in the Amal and Wulf and Raphael Aben Ezra, as I love Ivanhoe, and Front de Bœuf, and Wamba the Witless. The fight between "English mastiffs and Spanish bloodhounds" is as stirring as the skirmish of Drumclog in "Old Mortality." "Hypatia," according to Kingsley himself, was written with his heart's blood. Like other phrases of his, that requires a little dilution. But, at any rate, both books stand out for vividness, for a happy audacity and quickness of perception, above all modern attempts in the same direction.

The problems discussed in these historical novels and the solutions suggested are of course substantially the same as in his earlier books. The period of "Hypatia"

bears a striking analogy to the present. In the heroes described in "Westward Ho!" he supposed himself to recognise the fullest realisation of the fundamental doctrines of his own creed. Much might be said, were it worth saying, as to the accuracy of these assumptions. Kingsley's method is in any case too much tainted by the obvious tendency to see facts by the light of preconceived theories. In the earlier writings he may be one-sided and exaggerated; but his imagination is at least guided by reference to actual observation. It seems as if in this later period he had instinctively turned away to distant periods where men and events might be more easily moulded into conformity with his prejudices. However skilful a man may be in accommodating fact to fancy, he is apt to find difficulties when he paints from the life around him. But when nobody can contradict you except a few prosaic antiquaries, the outside world becomes delightfully malleable. You do not find any fragments of rigid material in the clay which shapes itself so easily in your fingers. Kingsley has faith enough in his teaching to give a genuine glow to these hybrid beings begotten half of fancy, half of the external world. But we feel too plainly that the work will not stand the test of close examination, either by the historian or the literary critic. Such a nemesis naturally overtakes men who admit too easily an appeal from fact to sentiment. They begin to lose the sense of reality, and their artistic work shows signs of flimsiness as their theories of arbitrary assumption. The great writer pierces to the true life of a period because he recognises the necessity of conforming his beliefs to realities. The inferior writer uses his knowledge only to give colouring to his dreams, and his work tries to represent what he would like to be the truth instead of showing genuine insight into what is actually true.

Whatever else in Kingsley may have been affected or

half-hearted, his appreciation of nature remained true and healthy to the end. If anything it became more intense as he seemed to grow weary of abstract discussions, and turned for relief to natural scenes. Nobody has ever shown a greater power of investing with a romantic charm the descriptions of bird, beast, and insect. There are no more delightful books than those which express the naturalist's delight in country sights, from the days of Izaak Walton to White of Selborne, or Waterton, or our most recent discovery, the Scotch naturalist Edward. Amongst such writers, Kingsley is in the front rank; and his taste is combined with a power of catching wider aspects of scenery, such as few of our professional describers can rival. It would be interesting to lay bare the secret of his power. He has done for Devon and Cornwall, for the heaths and chalk-streams of the southern counties, and even for the much-depreciated fens, what Scott did for the Highlands. One secret is of course the terseness and directness of his descriptions. He never lays himself out for a bit of deliberate bombast, and deals always with first-hand impressions. The writing is all alive. There is no dead matter of conventional phrases and imitative ecstasies. And again, his descriptions are always dramatic. There is a human being in the foreground with whom we sympathise. We do not lose ourselves in mystic meditations, or surrender ourselves to mere sensuous dreaming. We are in active, strenuous enjoyment; beguiling the trout of his favourite chalk-streams, sailing under the storm-beaten cliffs of Lundy, and drinking in the rich sea-breeze that sweeps over Dartmoor, or galloping with clenched teeth through the fir-woods of Eversley. One characteristic picture—to take one at random from a hundred—is the evening ride of Zeal-for-Truth Thoresby of Thoresby Rise in Deeping Fen as he rides slowly homeward after Naseby fight along one of the fen-droves. One could swear that one had been

with him, as Kingsley no doubt was merely embodying the vivid recollection of some old Cambridge expedition into the Bedford Level, a scenery which has a singular and mysterious charm, though few besides Kingsley have succeeded in putting it on paper.

Some wonder has been wasted on Kingsley's descriptions of the tropical scenery which he had never seen. Even men of genius do not work miracles; and so far as I know they always blunder in such attempts. Johnson showed his usual sense in regard to a similar criticism upon the blind poet, Blacklock. If, he said, you found that a paralytic man had left his room, you would explain the wonder by supposing that he had been carried. Similarly, the explanation of Kingsley and of Blacklock is that they described not what they had seen, but what they had read. The description in "Westward Ho!" may easily be traced to Humboldt and other sources where they are not explicable by a visit to Kew Gardens. A minute criticism would show that they are little more than catalogues of gorgeous plants and strange beasts; and show none of those vivid touches, so striking from their fidelity, which give animation to his descriptions of English scenery. In his pictures of Devonshire we can tell the time of the day and night and the state of the weather as clearly as if he were a meteorologist. In South America he leaves us to generalities. The true secret of his success is different. He describes vividly not the outward fact, but the inward enjoyment. One need not go to the tropics to imagine the charm of luxurious indolence. Perhaps we enjoy it the more because we have not really been exposed to its inconveniences. The dazzling of the eye by blazing sunlight and brilliant colours, the relief given by the cool deep streams under luxuriant foliage, the vague consciousness of wondrous forms of life lurking in the forest depths, can be realised without any special accuracy of portraiture. The contagion to which we are

really exposed is that of the enthusiasm with which Kingsley had read his favourite books of travel. But of downright description there is little, and that little not very remarkable. If anybody doubts it, he may read the passage of river scenery which concludes with a quotation from Humboldt, and observe how vividly the fragment of actual observation stands out from the mere catalogue of curiosities; or, again, with any of Kingsley's own Devonshire scenes, where every touch shows loving familiarity with details and a consequent power of selecting just the most speaking incidents.

We may put two passages beside each other which will illustrate the difference. Describing, after Humboldt, the mid-day calm of the forest, he says, "The birds' notes died out one by one; the very butterflies ceased their flitting over the treetops, and slept with outspread wings upon the glossy leaves, undistinguishable from the flowers around them. Now and then a colibri whirred downwards towards the water, hummed for a moment round some pendent flower, and then the living gem was lost in the deep darkness of the inner wood, among tree trunks as huge and dark as the pillars of some Hindoo shrine; or a parrot swung and screamed at them from an overhanging bough; or a thirsty monkey slid lazily down a liana to the surface of the stream, dipped up the water in his tiny hand, and started chattering back, as his eyes met those of some foul alligator peering upward through the clear depths below." This and more is good enough, but there is nothing which would not suggest itself to a visitor to the British Museum or the Zoological Gardens. It is a catalogue, and rather too full a catalogue of curiosities, without one of those vivid touches which reveal actual observation. At the end of the same volume we have a real sketch from nature. Amyas and his friends walk to the cliffs of Lundy: "As they approached, a raven, who sat upon the topmost stone, black against the bright blue

sky, flapped lazily away, and sank down the abysses of the cliff, as if he had scented the corpses beneath the surge. Below them, from the gull-rock rose a thousand birds, and filled the air with sound, the choughs cackled, the hacklets wailed, the great black-backs laughed querulous defiance at the intruders, and a single falcon, with an angry bark, darted out from beneath their feet, and hung poised high aloft watching the sea-fowl which swung slowly round and round below." That gives the atmospheric effect, and what we may call the dramatic character. Every phrase suggests a picture, and the whole description, of which I have quoted a bit, has real unity of effect, instead of being a simple enumeration of details.

When one reads some passages inspired by this hearty and simple-minded love of nature, one is sometimes half tempted to wish that Kingsley could have put aside his preachings, social, theological, and philosophical, and have been content with a function for which he was so admirably adapted. The men who can feel and make others feel the charms of beautiful scenery and stimulate the love for natural history do us a service which, if not the highest, is perhaps the most unalloyed by any mixture of evil. Kingsley would have avoided many errors and the utterance of much unsatisfactory dogmatism if he could have limited himself to such a duty. But to do so he must have been a man of narrower sympathies, less generous temper, and less hearty hatred of all evil influences. We could hardly wish him to have been other than he was, though we may wish that he had developed under more favourable circumstances. The weaknesses which marred his work and led to the exhaustion of his faculties were to be regretted, but were not such as to diminish the affection deserved by so cordial a nature. He is more or less responsible for those offensive persons, the Viking and the muscular Christian. The Viking, I suppose, must have been partly a humbug like other products of graphic

history, and too much has been made of his supposed share in our ancestry. Kingsley had a feminine tenderness and an impatient excitability indicative of a different ancestry. He admires the huge, full-blooded barbarians, but only belongs to them on one side. He is as near to his delicate as to his muscular heroes, to Francis as to Amyas Leigh, and to the morbid poet, Vavasour, as to the more vigorous Tom Thurnall. In these days, when the Viking or Berserker element seems to be dying out of our literature, even this qualified and external worship of masculine vigour is valuable. There is something hectic and spasmodic about it, though it implies a homage to more healthy ideals. Kingsley, at any rate, hated the namby-pamby, and he tried, with too obvious an effort, to be simple and unaffected. His aims were thoroughly noble, though marred by his want of reserve and of intellectual stamina. He was too timid or too impatient to work out consistent theories or acquire much depth of conviction. But with all his shortcomings he succeeded in giving forcible utterance to truths of vital importance, and brought vividly before our minds problems which most urgently press for a solution more satisfactory than he was able to reach.

GODWIN AND SHELLEY

The poetic and the metaphysical temperaments are generally held to be in some sense incompatible. Poets, indeed, have often shown the highest speculative acuteness, and philosophy often implies a really poetical imagination. But the necessary conditions of successful achievement in the two cases are so different that the combination of the two kinds of excellence in one man must be of excessive rarity. No man can be great as a philosopher who is incapable of brooding intensely and perseveringly over an abstract problem, absolutely unmoved by the emotion which is always seeking to bias his judgment; whilst a poet is great in virtue of the keenness of his sensibility to the emotional aspect of every decision of the intellect. For the one purpose, it is essential to keep the passions apart from the intellect: for the other, to transfuse intellect with passion. A few of our metaphysicians have ventured into poetical utterance. Berkeley wrote a really fine copy of verses, and Hobbes struck out one famous couplet—

> And like a star upon her bosom lay
> His beautiful and shining golden head—

in a translation of Homer, otherwise not easily readable. Scott proposed to publish the whole poetical works of David Hume, consisting of a remarkable quatrain composed in an inn at Carlisle.[1]

[1] Hume's biographer, Mr. Hill Burton, gives some other verses

Here chicks in eggs for breakfast sprawl,
Here godless boys God's glories squall,
Here Scotchmen's heads do guard the wall,
But Corby's walks atone for all.

The only exception to this rule in our literature seems to be Coleridge. Coleridge undoubtedly exercised a vast influence upon the speculation of his countrymen, whilst his poems possess merits of the rarest order. It is more worthy of remark that his poetry is most successful where it is most independent of his philosophy. In "Christabel," the "Ancient Mariner," or "Kubla Khan," we can only discover the philosopher by the evidence of a mind richly stored with associations, and by the tendency to discover a mystical significance in natural objects. Some people would urge that his philosophy would have been improved if it had been equally free from poetical elements. In any case, Coleridge is an example of a combination of diverse excellence not easily to be paralleled. Another poet was supposed by some of his admirers to have similar claims upon our respect. Shelley seems to have thought himself as well fitted for abstract speculation as for poetry; and his widow declared that, had he lived longer, he might have "presented to the world a complete theory of mind; a theory to which Berkeley, Coleridge, and Kant would have contributed; but more simple, unimpugnable, and entire than the systems of those writers." The phrase is by itself enough to prove Mrs. Shelley's incompetence to form any opinion as to her husband's qualifications for this stupendous task. It is not by forming a patchwork of Berkeley, Kant, and Coleridge that a "complete theory of mind" is likely to be evolved; nor does it appear that Shelley really knew much about either of the latter writers; certainly, he has not given the smallest proof of a power of original

attributed to Hume; but the impartial critic must admit that they are of inferior merit.

speculation in such matters. And yet, though it would be absurd to treat Shelley seriously as an originator of philosophic thought or even as a moderately profound student of philosophy, there is no doubt that his poetry contains a philosophical element which deserves consideration, if only to facilitate the comprehension of his poetry.

Enough has been written by the competent and the incompetent, the prosaic and the poetical, the hyperbolical panegyrists and the calm analytical critics, of Shelley considered primarily as a poet. Nobody, as it seems to me, is entitled to add anything who has not himself a very unusual share, if not of Shelley's own peculiar genius, at least of receptivity for its products; and after all that has been written by the ablest writers, one can learn more of Shelley by getting, say, the "Adonais" or the "Ode to the Skylark" by heart than by studying volumes of talk about his works. At any rate, I feel no vocation to add to the mass of imperfectly appreciative disquisition. Recent discussions, however, seem to show both that some interest is still taken in the other aspect of Shelley's writings, and that an obvious remark or two still remains to be made. People are in doubt whether to classify Shelley as atheist, pantheist, or theist; they dispute as to whether his writings represent the destructive spirit which undermines all that is good amongst men, or, on the contrary, are the fullest expression yet reached by any human being of the divinest element of religion. Were it not that some parallel phenomena might be very easily suggested, it would be surprising that the meaning of a writer, who had extraordinary powers of expressing himself clearly and an almost morbid hatred of anything like reticence, should be seriously doubtful. The explanation of the wonder is not, I think, very far to seek. For one thing, people have not yet made up their minds as to the true bearing

of some opinions which Shelley undoubtedly held. The question whether they were of good or evil import is mixed up with the question as to whether they were true or false. Upon that problem I shall not touch; but a few pages may be occupied by an attempt to indicate what, as a matter of fact, Shelley actually held, or rather what was his general attitude as to certain important questions. One result will probably be that it matters very little what he held as far as his influence upon our own conclusions is concerned. For, to say nothing of Shelley's incapacity to deal satisfactorily with the great controversies of his own time, our point of view has so much shifted that we can consider his opinions almost as calmly as those of the Eleatics or the Pythagoreans. They are matters of history which need affect nobody at the present day.

The volume of essays by the late Mr. Bagehot, recently published, contains one upon Shelley, which deals very clearly and satisfactorily, as far as it goes, with this part of Shelley's work. Mr. Bagehot showed with his usual acuteness how Shelley's philosophy reflected the abnormal peculiarities of his character. He speaks less, however, of certain extraneous influences which must have materially affected Shelley's intellectual developments, and, indeed, seems to have partly overlooked them. He tells us, for example, that Shelley's poems show an "extreme suspicion of aged persons." Undoubtedly a youthful enthusiast is apt to be shocked by the dogged conservatism of older men who have been hammered into a more accurate measure of the immovable weight of superincumbent prejudice in the human mind. Shelley could not revolt against things in general without contracting some dislike to the forces against which he inevitably ran his head at starting. Even here, indeed, the charm of Shelley's unworldly simplicity for men of an opposite type, for cynics like Hogg, and Peacock, and

Byron, is one of the pleasantest indications of his character. He attracted, and doubtless because he was attracted by, many who had nothing but contempt for his favourite enthusiasms, and it is still more evident that, however wayward was his career in some relations of life, he had a full measure of the young man's capacity for reverence. Dr. Lind seems to have been his earliest idol; but a far more important connection was that with Godwin. Godwin was in his fifty-sixth, and Shelley in his twentieth year, when their correspondence began, and Godwin's most remarkable book was published when Shelley was in the cradle. Young gentlemen of nineteen, even though they belong to the immortals, consider a man of fifty-six to be tottering upon the verge of the grave. Books published before we could spell appear to have been composed before the invention of letters. To Shelley, in short, Godwin was to all intents and purposes a venerable sage, and a fitting embodiment of hoary wisdom. A guide, philosopher, and friend—an oracle who can sanction his aspirations and direct him to the most promising paths—is almost a necessity to every youthful enthusiast; the more necessary in proportion as he has more emphatically broken with the established order. What J. S. Mill was to men who were in their early youth some twenty or thirty years ago, or Newman to young men of different views at a slightly earlier period, that Godwin was to Shelley in the years of his most impetuous speculation. A lad of genius reads old books with eager appetite and learns something from them; but to get the full influence of ideas he must feel that they come from a living mouth, clothed in modern dialect, and applied to the exciting topics of the day. Perhaps neither Mill nor Newman said anything which might not be found implicitly contained in the writings of their spiritual ancestors. Much of Mill is already to be found in Locke, and Newman is at times the interpreter

of Butler. But then Butler and Locke have been dead for a long time; and what the impatient youth requires is the direct evidence that the ancient principles are still alive and efficient. The old key has probably become rusty, and is more or less obsolete in form. The youth cannot wait to oil and repair it for himself. He wants the last new invention spick and span, and ready to be applied at once to open the obstinate lock. Shelley read Helvetius and Holbach, and Berkeley and Hume; but, though they supplied him with a tolerably modern version of some ancient theories, they could not tell him by anticipation what precise form of argument would best crush Paley, or what specific policy would regenerate Ireland out of hand. For such purposes a young man wants the very last new teacher, and the chances are that he will read even the older philosophers through the spectacles which such a teacher is kind enough to provide.

Thus, when looking about in this dark world, given over, as he thought, to antiquated prejudice embodied in cruel injustice, Shelley greeted the writings of Godwin as the lost traveller greets a beacon-fire on a stormy night. They seemed to contain a new gospel. When he discovered the author to be a real human being, not one of the fixed stars that have been already guiding us from the upper firmament, he threw himself at the philosopher's feet with the rapt fervour of a religious neophyte. In his first letters to Godwin he pours out his heart: "Considering these feelings" (the feelings, namely, of reverence and admiration which he has entertained for the name of Godwin), "you will not be surprised at the inconceivable emotions with which I learnt your existence and your dwelling. I had enrolled your name in the lists of the honourable dead. I had felt regret that the glory of your being had passed from this earth of ours. It is not so; you still live and, I firmly believe, are still planning the welfare of human

kind." A letter written soon afterwards from Dublin is still more significant. It begins with a kind of invocation, as to a saint. "Guide thou and direct me," exclaims the young gentleman; "in all the weakness of my inconsistencies bear with me; . . . when you reprove me, reason speaks; I acquiesce in her decisions." He presently defends the impatience which Godwin has blamed by an argument which evidently struck even Godwin as having an absurd side. The "Political Justice," he says, was first published nearly twenty years before (or almost at the dawn of history!), but yet what has resulted from the general diffusion of its doctrines? "Have men ceased to fight? Have woe and misery vanished from the earth?" Far from it! Obviously something must be done, and that at once. Do I not well to be impatient, he says, when such reasonable expectations have been so cruelly disappointed?

It must be a most delightful sensation to have so ardent a disciple; but it must also be a trifle provoking when the ardour is of a kind to justify some misgiving as to the sanity of the proselyte. Even the vanity of a philosopher could hardly blind him to the fact that such extravagance tended to throw ridicule upon its object. Godwin, however, kept his countenance—a little too easily perhaps—and gave very sensible advice to his proselyte. He pointed out in substance that it was not altogether amazing that vice and misery had survived the publication of his wonderful book, and still recommended patience and acceptance of the strange stupidity of mankind. We are aware that in later years Shelley's reverence lost a little of its warmth: he came to know Godwin personally. Moreover, among his other tenets, the calm philosopher held the comfortable doctrine that philosophers might and ought to receive pecuniary assistance from the rich without any loss of dignity. His practical application of this theory is described by Professor

Dowden. It no doubt soon convinced Shelley that Godwin was not altogether free from earthly stains, and in fact not so indifferent as he ought to have been to the possible advantages of a connection with the heir to a baronetcy and a good estate.

For the present, however, Shelley sat humbly at Godwin's feet. He declared that from the "Political Justice" he had learnt "all that was valuable in knowledge and virtue." He mixed with the queer little clique of vegetarians and crotchet-mongers who shared his reverence for Godwin and excited the bitter contempt of Hogg. It is, therefore, not surprising that we find Shelley's doctrines to present a curiously close coincidence with Godwin's. Partly, no doubt, it was simply a coincidence. Shelley's temperament predisposed him to accept conclusions which were in the air of the time, and which were to be found more or less represented in many of his other authorities. But, at any rate, we may fairly assume not only that he, as he was eager to proclaim, learnt much from Godwin, but also that his whole course of thought was guided to a great degree by this living representative of his favourite theories. He studied the "Political Justice," pondered its words of wisdom, and examined its minutest details. One trifling indication may be mentioned. Amongst Shelley's fragmentary essays is one upon "A System of Government by Juries"—a "singular speculation," as Mr. Rossetti naturally remarks. But the explanation is simply that Godwin's theory, worked out in the "Political Justice," sets forth government by these so-called juries as the ultimate or penultimate stage of human society. Shelley, like a faithful disciple, was writing an incipient commentary upon one of his teacher's texts. The fragmentary "Essay on Christianity," of about the same date (1815), is virtually an attempt to show that the valuable part of the Christian religion is its supposed

anticipation of Godwin's characteristic tenets. But the coincidence does not consist in any minute points of external resemblance. Godwin's poetical writings seem to have been pretty well forgotten, though some interest in him is maintained by "Caleb Williams" and by his relationship to Shelley. Hogg is evidently anxious to sink as much as possible the intellectual obligations of the disciple to so second-rate a teacher; and later writers upon Shelley are content to speak vaguely of Godwin as a man who had some philosophic reputation in his day, and some influence upon the poet. A full exposition of Godwin's theories would display the closeness of the mental affinity. That may be found elsewhere; but a brief indication of his main tendencies will be sufficient for the present purpose.

Godwin appeared to many youthful contemporaries—as may be seen from the brilliant sketch in Hazlitt's "Spirit of the Age"—as a very incarnation of philosophy. "No work in our time," says Hazlitt, "gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated "Enquiry concerning Political Justice." Tom Paine was considered for the time a Tom fool to him, Paley an old woman, Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode, and these were the oracles of thought." Hazlitt is not given to measuring his words, and he was probably wishing to please the decaying old gentleman. But doubtless there is some truth in the statement. Godwin was admirably fitted to be an apostle of reason, so far as a man can be fitted for that high post, by the negative qualifications of a placid temper and singular frigidity of disposition. He works out the most startling and subversive conclusions with all the calmness of a mathematician manipulating a set of algebraical symbols. He lays down doctrines which shock not only the religious reverence, but the ordinary conscience of mankind, as

quietly as if he were stating a proposition of Euclid. An entire absence of even a rudimentary sense of humour is of course implied in this placid enunciation of paradoxes without the slightest preception of their apparent enormity. But then a sense of humour is just the quality which we do not desiderate in a revered philosopher.

It admits of more doubt whether Godwin possessed in any marked degree the positive qualification of high reasoning power. What is called "remorseless logic"—the ruthless sweeping aside of every consideration that conflicts with our deductions from certain assumptions—is as often a proof of weakness as of strength. Nothing is so easy as to be perfectly symmetrical and consistent, if you will calmly accept every paradox that flows from your principles and call it a plain conclusion instead of a *reductio ad absurdum*. A man who is quite ready to say that black is white whenever the whiteness of black is convenient for his argument, may easily pass with some people for a great reasoner. Godwin, however, was beyond question a man of considerable power, though neither vigorous enough nor sufficiently familiar with the wider philosophical conceptions to produce results of much permanent value. Crude thinkers habitually mistake the blunders into which they, like their fathers before them, have fallen for genuine discoveries. They have once more made the old mistakes, and do not know that the mistakes have been exposed.

Godwin was familiar with the recent school of French materialists, and with the writings of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. He worked out by their help a system which curiously combines opposite modes of thought. He was, in one sense, a thoroughgoing sceptic. Nobody could set aside more completely the whole body of theological speculation. He assumes that all the old religions are exploded superstitions. He did not argue against Theism, like Shelley; and, indeed, arguments

that might lead him into personal difficulty were not much to his taste. But he virtually ignores all such doctrine as undeniably effete. So far he, of course, sympathises with the French materialists, and with them he abolishes at one blow all the traditional and prescriptive beliefs of mankind. The fact that a doctrine has been generally accepted is a presumption rather against it than in its favour. He will believe nothing, nor even temporarily accept any practical precept which is not capable of direct scientific proof. But, in the next place, Godwin did not in any sense accept the materialism of the French writers. He, like other English thinkers, had been profoundly impressed by the idealism of Berkeley. But then he extends Berkeley by the aid of Hume. He abolishes not only matter but mind. It may be still convenient to use the word mind, but in fact there is nothing, so far as we know, but a chain of "ideas" which somehow link themselves together so as to produce the complex idea we generally know by that name. Of any substratum, any internal power which causes the coherence of these ideas or of the universe in general, we know and can know absolutely nothing.

When a man has got so far, he not unfrequently begins to feel himself a little bewildered. Nothing is left—to quote from a philosopher of whom neither Godwin nor Shelley apparently ever heard—but "ceaseless change." "I know of no being, not even of my own. Pictures are—they are the only things which exist, and they know of themselves after the fashion of pictures; pictures which float past without there being anything past which they float, which by means of like pictures are connected with each other; pictures without anything which is pictured in them, without significance and without aim. I myself am one of these pictures—nay, I am not even this, but merely a confused picture of the pictures. All reality is transformed into a strange dream,

without a life which is dreamed of, and without a mind which dreams it; with a dream which is woven together in a dream of itself. Perception is the dream; thought is the dream of that dream.'

This description of the thoroughgoing sceptical position might pass (to anticipate for a moment) for a description of the state of mind produced by some of Shelley's poetry. It is, at any rate, a state of mind from which a reasoner is generally anxious to provide some escape, lest all ground for reasoning should be cut away. How can knowledge be possible if the mind is merely a stream of baseless impressions, cohering or separating according to radically unknowable laws? Godwin, however, goes on calmly, without any attempt to solve our difficulties, and proceeds to build up his scheme of perfectibility. Upon this shifting quicksand of utter scepticism he lays the foundations of his ideal temple of reason. For, as he argues, since a man is nothing but an aggregate of "ideas" he is capable of indefinite modification. Education or the influences of climate or race can have no ineradicable power upon this radically arbitrary combination of flitting phantasms. Anything may be the cause of anything; for cause means nothing but the temporary coherence of two sets of unsubstantial images. And hence, we may easily abolish all the traditional ties by which people have hitherto been bound together, and rearrange the whole structure of human society on principles of mathematical and infallible perfection. The force which is to weave ropes of sand, or rather to arrange the separate independent unsubstantial atoms in a perfect mathematical sphere, rounded, complete and eternal, is the force of reason.

Godwin is troubled by no misgiving as to the power of reason when all reality seems to have been abolished. He quietly takes for granted that reason is the sole and sufficient force by which men are or may be guided, and

that it is adequate for any conceivable task. Not only can it transform society at large, but it is potentially capable of regenerating any given individual. The worst scoundrel could be made into a saint if only you could expose him to a continuous discharge of satisfactory syllogisms. Reason, as he calmly observes, is "omnipotent." Therefore, he infers, when a man's conduct is wrong, a very simple statement will not only show it to be wrong—just as it is easy to show that two sides of a triangle are greater than the third—but make him good. No perverseness, he thinks, would resist a sufficiently intelligible statement of the advantages of virtue. From this agreeable postulate, which he regards as pretty nearly self-evident, Godwin draws conclusions from some of which, great as was his courage in accepting absurdities, he afterwards found it expedient to withdraw. Thus, for example, morality, according to him, means simply the right calculation of consequences—I must always act so as to produce the greatest sum of happiness. The accidental ties, the associations formed by contingent circumstances, are no more to override this principle than a proposition of Euclid is to vary when applied to different parts of space. Three angles of a triangle are as much equal to two right angles in England as in France. Similarly the happiness of an Englishman is just as valuable as the happiness of a Frenchman, and the happiness of a stranger as the happiness of my relations. Hence—so runs his logic—friendship, gratitude, and conjugal fidelity are simply mistakes. If my father is a worse man than a stranger, I should rather save the stranger's life than my father's, for I shall be contributing more to human happiness. If my wife and I are tired of each other, we had better form new connections, for it is unreasonable to sacrifice happiness to any accidental ties. Any particular rule, indeed, is so far a mistake; for to act upon such a rule is to

disregard the general principles of reason. In every action and in every relation of life, I should hold myself absolutely free to act simply and solely with reference to the greatest happiness. Habits are bad, for habits imply disregard of reason, and all promises are immoral, for to keep a promise is to pay a blind obedience to the past. To punish is unreasonable; for, in pure reason, we have no more right to hate a villain than a viper or a cup of poison. The only legitimate end of punishment is reform, and reform should be produced by argument instead of imprisonment. All coercion is clearly bad, for coercion is not argument; and, since all government implies coercion, all government is immoral. Society, in short, must be reduced to an aggregate of independent atoms, free from all conventions, from all prescriptive rights and privileges, without the slightest respect for any traditional institutions, and acting at every moment in obedience to the pure dictates of reason.

When these principles have forced their way, and the omnipotence of reason shows their triumph to be only a question of time, we shall reach the millennium. Mind will then be omnipotent over matter (though it is rather hard to say what either of those two entities may be); kings, priests, laws, and family associations will disappear; and every man will live in perfect peace and happiness in the light of reason. One difficulty, indeed, suggests itself. Why, if reason be thus omnipotent, has it done so little in the past? Whence this persistence of inequality and injustice, this enormous power of sheer obstinate, unreasoning prejudice in a set of beings who are to be so completely regenerated by the power of pure reason? Monarchy, he declares summarily, is founded on imposture. How, if reason be the one force, has imposture been so successful, and, if successful for so long, why should it not be successful hereafter?

To this Godwin has no very intelligible answer, or

perhaps he hardly sees that an answer is desirable. But, in truth, his whole system appears to be so grotesque when brought to one focus and distinctly stated, that we must in fairness recall two things: first, that most philosophical systems appear absurd when summarised after their extinction; and, secondly, that in bringing out in a very brief space the most salient features of such a doctrine, it is quite impossible to avoid caricature. There is enough not only of apparent philosophy in it, but of really intelligent—though strangely one-sided—reflection to enable us to understand how this deification of reason, falling in with the most advanced movements of the time, should affect Shelley's simple, impulsive, and marvellously imaginative nature. Men of much stricter logical training considered Godwin to be a great, if paradoxical, thinker, and Shelley, who had rather an affinity for abstract metaphysical ideas than a capacity for constructing them into logical wholes, was for a time entirely carried away. When after reading Godwin's quiet prosaic enunciation of the most startling paradoxes in the least impassioned language, we turn to Shelley's poetical interpretation, the two seem to be related as the stagnant pool to the rainbow-coloured mist into which it has been transmuted. Shelley's fervid enthusiasm has vapourised the slightly muddy philosophic prose, changed it into impalpable ether, and tinged it with the most brilliant, if evanescent, hue. Shelley had certainly learnt from others besides Godwin, and in particular had begun those Platonic readings which afterwards generated his characteristic belief in a transcendental world, the abode of the archetypal ideas of beauty, love, and wisdom. But through all his poetry we find a recurrence of the same ideas which he had originally imbibed from his first master.

The Godwinism, indeed, is strongest in the crude poetry of "Queen Mab," where many passages read like the "Political Justice" done into verse. So, for example,

we have a naïf statement of the incoherent theory which has already been noticed in Godwin's treatise. After pointing to some of the miseries which afflict unfortunate mankind, and observing that they are not due to man's "evil nature," which, it seems, is merely a figment invented to excuse crimes, the question naturally suggests itself, to what, then, can all this mischief be due? Nature has made everything perfect and harmonious, except man. On man alone she has, it seems, heaped "ruin, vice, and slavery." But the indignant answer is given:

> Nature! No!
> Kings, priests, and statesmen blast the human flower
> Even in its tender bud; their influence darts
> Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
> Of desolate society.

According to this ingenious view, "kings, priests, and statesmen" are something outside of, and logically opposed to, Nature. They represent the evil principle in this strange dualism. Whence this influence arises, how George III. and Paley and Lord Eldon came to possess an existence independent of Nature, and acquired the power of turning all her good purpose to nought, is one of those questions which we can hardly refrain from asking, but which it would be obviously unkind to press. Still less would it be to the purpose to ask how this beneficent Nature is related to the purely neutral Necessity, which is "the mother of the world," or how, between the two, such a monstrous birth as the "prolific fiend" Religion came into existence. The crude incoherence of the whole system is too obvious to require exposition; and yet it is simply an explicit statement of Godwin's theories put forth with inconvenient excess of candour. The absurdities slurred over by the philosopher are thrown into brilliant relief by the poet.

Shelley improved as a poet, and in a degree rarely

exemplified in poetry, between "Queen Mab" and the "Prometheus"; but even in the "Prometheus" and his last writings we find a continued reflection of Godwin's characteristic views. Everywhere as much a prophet as a poet, Shelley is always announcing, sometimes in exquisite poetry, the advent of the millennium. His conception of the millennium, if we try to examine precisely what it is, always embodies the same thought, that man is to be made perfect by the complete dissolution of all the traditional ties by which the race is at present bound together. In the passage which originally formed the conclusion to the "Prometheus," the "Spirit of the Hour" reveals the approaching consummation. The whole passage is a fine one, and it is almost a shame to quote fragments; but we may briefly observe that in the coming world everybody is to say exactly what he thinks; women are to be—

> gentle radiant forms,
> From custom's evil taint exempt and pure;
> Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
> Looking emotions once they feared to feel.

Thrones, altars, judgment seats, and prisons are to be abolished when reason is absolute; and when

> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself.

To be "unclassed, tribeless, and nationless, and we may add, without marriage, is to be in the lowest depths of barbarism. It is so, at least, in the world of realities. But the description will fit that "state of nature" of which philosophers of the time delighted to talk. The best comment is to be found in Godwin. The great mistake of Rousseau, says that writer, was that whilst

truly recognising government to be the source of all evil, he chose to praise the state which preceded government, instead of the state which, we may hope, will succeed its abolition. When we are perfect, we shall get rid of all laws of every kind, and thus, in some sense, the ultimate goal of all progress is to attain precisely to that state of nature which Rousseau regretted as a thing of the past and which is described in Shelley's glowing rhetoric.

The difficulty of making this view coherent is curiously reflected in the mechanism of Shelley's great poem; great it is, for the marvel of its lyrical excellence is fortunately independent of the conceptions of life and human nature which it is intended to set forth. If all the complex organisation which has slowly evolved itself in the course of history, the expression of which is civilisation, order, coherence, and co-operation in the different departments of life, is to be set down as an unmitigated evil, the fruit of downright imposture, all history becomes unintelligible. Man, potentially perfectible, has always been the sport of what seems to be a malignant and dark power of utterly inexplicable origin and character. Shelley, we are told, could not bear to read history. The explanation offered is that he was too much shocked by the perpetual record of misery, tyranny, and crime. A man who can see nothing else in history is obviously a very inefficient historian. Godwin tells us that he had learnt from Swift's bitter misanthropy the truth that all political institutions are hopelessly corrupt. A fusion of the satirist's view, that all which is is bad, with the enthusiast's view, that all which will be will be perfect, just expresses Shelley's peculiar mixture of optimism and pessimism. When we try to translate this into a philosophical view or a poetical representation of the world, the consequence is inevitably perplexing.

Thus Shelley tells us in the preface to the "Prometheus" that he could not accept the view, adopted by

Æschylus, of a final reconciliation between Jupiter and his victim. He was "averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of mankind." He cannot be content with the intimate mixture of good and evil which is presented in the world as we know it. He must have absolute good on one side, contrasted with absolute evil on the other. But it would seem—as far as one is justified in attaching any precise meaning to poetical symbols—that the fitting catastrophe to the world's drama must be in some sense a reconciliation between Prometheus and Jupiter; or, in other words, between the reason and the blind forces by which it is opposed. The ultimate good must be not the annihilation of all the conditions of human life, but the slow conquest of nature by the adaptation of the life to its conditions. We learn to rule nature, as it is generally expressed, by learning to obey it. Any such view, however, is uncongenial to Shelley, though he might have derived it from Bacon, one of the professed objects of his veneration. The result of his own view is that the catastrophe of the drama is utterly inexplicable and mysterious. Who are Jupiter and Demogorgon? Why, when Demogorgon appears in the car of the Hours, and tells Jupiter that the time is come, and that they are both to dwell together in darkness henceforth, does Jupiter immediately give up with a cry of Ai! Ai! and descend (as one cannot help irreverently suggesting) as through a theatrical trapdoor? Dealing with such high matters, and penetrating to the very ultimate mystery of the universe, we must of course be prepared for surprising inversions. A mysterious blind destiny is at the bottom of everything, according to Shelley, and of course it may at any moment crush the whole existing order in utter annihilation. And yet, it is impossible not to feel that here, too, we have still the same incoherence which was shown more crudely in "Queen Mab." The absolute destruction of all law, and

of law not merely in the sense of human law, but of the laws in virtue of which the stars run their course and the frame of the universe is bound together, is the end to which we are to look forward. It will come when it will come; for it is impossible to join on such a catastrophe to any of the phenomenal series of events, of which alone we can obtain any kind of knowledge. The actual world, it is plain, is regarded as a hideous nightmare. The evil dream will dissolve and break up when something awakes us from our mysterious sleep; but that something, whatever it may be, must of course be outside the dream, and not a consummation worked out by the dream itself. We expect a catastrophe, not an evolution. And, finally, when the dream dissolves, when the "painted veil" called life is drawn aside, what will be left?

Some answer—and a remarkable answer—is given by Shelley. But first we may say one word in reference to a point already touched. The entire dissolution of all existing laws was part of Shelley's, as of Godwin's, programme. The amazing calmness with which the philosopher summarily disposes of marriage in a cursory paragraph or two, as (in the words of the old story) a fond thing, foolishly invented and repugnant to the plain teaching of reason, is one of the most grotesque crudities of his book. This doctrine has to be taken into account both in judging of Shelley's character and considering some of his poetical work. It is, of course, frequently noticed in extenuation or aggravation of the most serious imputation upon his character. We are told that Shelley can be entirely cleared by revelations which have not as yet been made. That is satisfactory, and would be still more satisfactory if we were sure that his apologists fully appreciated the charge. According to the story as hitherto published, we can only say that his conduct seems to indicate a flightiness and impulsiveness inconsistent with real depth of sentiment. The complaint is that he

behaved ill to the first Mrs. Shelley, considered not as a wife, but as a human being, and as a human being then possessing a peculiar and special claim upon his utmost tenderness. This is only worth saying in order to suggest the answer to a casuistical problem which seems to puzzle his biographers. Is a man the better or the worse because, when he breaks a moral law, he denies it to be moral? Is he to be more or less condemned because, whilst committing a murder, he proceeds to assert that everybody ought to commit murder when he chooses? Without seeking to untwist all the strands of a very pretty problem, I will simply say that, to my mind, the question must in the last resort be simply one of fact. What we have to ask is the quality implied by his indifference to the law? If a man acts wrongly from benevolent feeling, misguided by some dexterous fallacy, his error affords no presumption that he is otherwise intrinsically bad. If, on the other hand, his indifference to the law arises from malice, or sensuality, it must of course lower our esteem for him in proportion, under whatever code of morality he may please to shelter his misdoings.

In Shelley's particular case we should probably be disposed to ascribe his moral deficiencies to the effect of crude but specious theory upon a singularly philanthropic but abnormally impulsive mind. No one would accuse him of any want of purity or generosity; but we might regard him as wanting in depth and intensity of sentiment. Allied to this moral weakness is his incapacity for either feeling in himself or appreciating in others the force of ordinary human passions directed to a concrete object. The only apology that can be made for his selection of the singularly loathsome motive for his drama is in the fact that in his hands the chief character becomes simply an incarnation of purely intellectual wickedness; he is a new avatar of the mysterious principle of evil which generally appears as a priest or king; he represents

the hatred to good in the abstract rather than subservience to the lower passions. It is easy to understand how Shelley's temperament should lead him to undervalue the importance of the restraints which are rightly regarded as essential to social welfare, and fall in with Godwin's tranquil abolition of marriage as an uncomfortable fetter upon the perfect liberty of choice. But it is also undeniable that the defect not only makes his poetry rather unsatisfying to those coarser natures which cannot support themselves on the chameleon's diet, but occasionally leads to unpleasant discords. Thus, for example, the worshippers of Shelley generally regard the "Epipsychidion" as one of his finest poems, and are inclined to warn off the profane vulgar as unfitted to appreciate its beauties. It is, perhaps, less difficult to understand than to sympathise very heartily with the sentiment by which it is inspired. There are abundant precedents, both in religious and purely imaginative literature, for regarding a human passion as in some sense typifying, or identical with, the passion for ideal perfection. So far a want of sympathy may imply a deficiency in poetic sensibility. But I cannot believe that the "Vita Nuova" (to which we are referred) would have been the better if Dante had been careful to explain that there was another lady besides Beatrice for whom he had an almost equal devotion; nor do I think that it is the prosaic part of us which protests when Shelley thinks it necessary to expound his anti-matrimonial theory in the "Epipsychidion." Why should he tell us that—

> I never was attached to that great sect,
> Whose doctrine is that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,

and so on; in short, that he despises the "modern morals" which distinctly approve of monogamy? Human love, one would say, becomes a fitting type of a loftier emotion, in so far as it implies exclusive devotion

to its object. During this uncomfortable intrusion of a discordant theory, we seem to be listening less to the passionate utterance of a true poet than to the shrill tones of a conceited propagator of flimsy crotchets, proclaiming his tenets without regard to truth or propriety. Mrs. Shelley does not seem to have entered into the spirit of the composition; and we can hardly wonder if she found this little bit of argument rather a stumbling-block to her comprehension.

To return, however, from these moral deductions to the more general principles. It is scarcely necessary to insist at length upon the peculiar idealism implied in Shelley's poetry. It is, of course, the first characteristic upon which every critic must fasten. The materials with which he works are impalpable abstractions where other poets use concrete images. His poetry is like the subtle veil woven by the witch of Atlas from "threads of fleecy mists," "long lines of light," such as are kindled by the dawn and "starbeams." When he speaks of natural scenery the solid earth seems to be dissolved, and we are in presence of nothing but the shifting phantasmagoria of cloudland, the glow of moonlight on eternal snow, or the "golden lightning of the setting sun." The only earthly scenery which recalls Shelley to a more material mind is that which one sees from a high peak at sunrise, when the rising vapours tinged with prismatic colours shut out all signs of human life, and we are alone with the sky and the shadowy billows of the sea of mountains. Only in such vague regions can Shelley find fitting symbolism for those faint emotions suggested by the most abstract speculations, from which he alone is able to extract an unearthly music. To insist upon this would be waste of time. Nobody, one may say briefly, has ever expanded into an astonishing variety of interpretation the familiar text of Shakespeare—

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little lives
> Are rounded with a sleep.

The doctrine is expressed in a passage in "Hellas," where Ahasuerus states this as the final result of European thought. The passage, like so many in Shelley, shows that he had Shakespeare in his mind without exactly copying him. The Shakespearian reference to the "cloud-capped towers" and "gorgeous palaces" is echoed in the verses which conclude with the words :—

> This whole
> Of suns and worlds, and men and beasts, and flower
> With all the violent and tempestuous working
> By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
> Is but a vision: *all that it inherits*
> Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
> Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
> The future and the past are idle shadows
> Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being.
> Nought is but that it feels itself to be.

The italicised words point to the original in the "Tempest;" but Shelley proceeds to expound his theory more dogmatically than Prospero, and we are not quite surprised when Mahmoud is puzzled and declares that the words "stream like a tempest of dazzling mist through his brain." The words represent the most characteristic effect of Shelley as accurately as the aspect of consistent idealism to a prosaic mind.

It need not be said how frequently the thought occurs in Shelley. We might fix him to a metaphysical system if we interpreted him prosaically. When in "Prometheus" Panthea describes to Asia a mysterious dream, suddenly Asia sees another shape pass between her and the "golden dew" which gleams through its substance. "What is it?" she asks. "It is mine other dream," replies Panthea. "It disappears," exclaims Asia. "It passes now into my mind," replies Panthea. We are, that is, in a region where dreams walk as visible as the dreamers, and pass into or out of a mind which is indeed

only a collection of dreams. The archaic mind regarded dreams as substantial or objective realities. In Shelley the reality is reduced to the unsubstantiality of a dream. To the ordinary thinker, the spirit is (to speak in materialist language) the receptacle of ideas. With Shelley, a little further on, we find that the relation is inverted; spirits themselves inhabit ideas; they live in the mind as in an ocean. Thought is the ultimate reality which contains spirits and ideas and dreams, if, rather, it is not simpler to say that everything is a dream.

The Faery-land of Spenser might be classified in our inadequate phraseology as equally "ideal" with Shelley's impalpable scenery. But Spenser's allegorical figures are as visible as the actors in a masque; and, in fact, the "Faery Queen" is a masque in words. His pages are a gallery of pictures, and may supply innumerable subjects for the artist. To illustrate Shelley would be as impossible as to paint a strain of music, unless, indeed, some of Turner's cloud scenery may be taken as representative of his incidental descriptions.

This language frequently reminds us of metaphysical doctrines which were unknown to Shelley in their modern shape. Nobody, perhaps, is capable of thinking in this fashion in ordinary life; and Shelley, with all his singular visions and hallucinations, probably took the common-sense view of ordinary mortals in his dealings with commonplace or facts. It is surprising enough that, even for purely poetical purposes, he could continue this to the ordinary conceptions of object and subject. But his familiarity with this point of view may help to explain some of the problems as to his ultimate belief. It is plain that he was in some sense dissatisfied with the simple scepticism of Godwin. But he found no successor to guide his speculations. Coleridge once regretted that Shelley had not applied to him instead of Southey, who, in truth, was as ill qualified as a man could well be to help

a young enthusiast through the mazes of metaphysical entanglement. It is idle to speculate upon the possible result. Shelley, if we may judge from a passage in his epistle to Mrs. Gisborne, had no very high opinion of Coleridge's capacity as a spiritual guide. Shelley, in fact, in spite of his so-called mysticism, was an ardent lover of clearness, and would have been disgusted by the haze in which Coleridge enwrapped his revelations to mankind. But Coleridge might possibly have introduced him to a sphere of thought in which he could have found something congenial. One parallel may be suggested which will perhaps help to illustrate this position.

Various passages have been quoted from Shelley's poetry to prove that he was a theist and a believer in immortality. His real belief, it would seem, will hardly run into any of the orthodox moulds. It is understood as clearly as may be in the conclusion to the "Sensitive Plant":—

> —in this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife,
> Where nothing is, but all things seem,
> And we see the shadows of the dream.
>
> It is a modest creed, and yet
> Pleasant if one considers it,
> To own that death itself must be
> Like all the rest, a mockery.
>
> That garden sweet, that lady fair,
> And all sweet shapes and odours there
> In truth have never passed away;
> 'Tis we, 'tis ours have changed; not they.

A fuller exposition of the thought is given in the "Adonais;" and some of the phrases suggest the parallel to which I refer. I have already quoted from one of the popular works of Fichte, the "Vocation of Man," a vigorous description of that state of utter scepticism, which seems at one point to be the final goal of his

idealism, as it was that of the less elaborate form of the same doctrine which Godwin had learnt from Berkeley. Godwin, as I have said, was content to leave the difficulty without solution. Fichte escaped, or thought that he escaped, by a solution which restores a meaning to much of the orthodox language. Whether his mode of escape was satisfactory or his final position intelligible, is of course another question. But it is interesting to observe how closely the language in which his final doctrine is set forth to popular readers resembles some passages in the "Adonais." I will quote a few phrases which may be sufficiently significant.

Shelley, after denouncing the unlucky "Quarterly Reviewer" who had the credit of extinguishing poor Keats, proceeds to find consolation in the thought that Keats has now become

> A portion of the eternal, which must glow
> Through time and change, unquenchably the same
> Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

> Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
> He hath awakened from the dream of life;
> 'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
> With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
> And, in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
> Invulnerable nothings—*we* decay
> Like corpses in a charnel, fear and grief
> Convulse and consume us day by day,
> And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

So, when Fichte has achieved his deliverance from scepticism, his mind is closed for ever against embarrassment and perplexity, doubt, uncertainty, grief, repentance, and desire. "All that happens belongs to the plan of the eternal world and is good in itself." If there are beings perverse enough to resist reason, he cannot be angry with them, for they are not free agents. They are what they are, and it is useless to be angry with "blind and unconscious nature." "What they actually are does not deserve

my anger; what might deserve it they are not, and they would not deserve it if they were. My displeasure would strike an impalpable nonentity," an "invulnerable nothing," as Shelley puts it. They are, in short, parts of the unreal dream to which belong grief, and hope, and fear, and desire. Death is the last of evils, he goes on; for the hour of death is the hour of birth to a new and more excellent life. It is, as Shelley says, waking from a dream. And now, when we have no longer desire for earthly things, or any sense for the transitory and perishable, the universe appears clothed in a more glorious form. "The dead heavy mass, which did but stop up space, has perished; and in its place there flows onward, with the rushing music of mighty waves, an eternal stream of life, and power, and action, which issues from the original source of all life—from thy life, O Infinite One! for all life is thy life, and only the religious eye penetrates to the realm of true Beauty. In all the forms that surround me I behold the reflection of my own being, broken up into countless diversified shapes, as the morning sun, broken in a thousand dewdrops, sparkles towards itself," a phrase which recalls Shelley's famous passage a little further on:—

> Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity.

The application, indeed, is there a little different; but Shelley has just the same thought of the disappearance of the "dead heavy mass" of the world of space and time. Keats, too, is translated to the "realm of true beauty."

> He is a portion of the loveliness
> Which once he made more lovely; he doth bear
> The part, while the one spirit's plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear!
> Torturing the unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the heaven's light.

There are important differences, as the metaphysician would point out, between the two conceptions, and language of a similar kind might be found in innumerable writers before and since. I only infer that the two minds are proceeding, if one may say so, upon parallel lines. Fichte, like Shelley, was accused of atheism, and his language would, like Shelley's, be regarded by mere readers as an unfair appropriation of old words to new meanings. Shelley had of course no definite metaphysical system to set beside that of the German philosopher; and had learnt what system he had rather from Plato than from Kant. It may also be called significant that Fichte finds the ultimate point of support in conscience or duty; whereas, in Shelley's theory, duty seems to vanish, and the one ultimate reality to be rather love or the beautiful. But it would be pedantic to attempt the discovery of a definite system of opinion where there is really nothing but a certain intellectual tendency. One can only say that, somehow or other, Shelley sought comfort under his general sense that everything is but the baseless fabric of a vision, and moreover a very uncomfortable vision, made up of pain, grief, and the "unrest which men miscall delight," in the belief, or, if belief is too strong a word, the imagination of a transcendental and eternal world of absolute perfection, entirely beyond the influence of "chance, and death, and mutability." Intellectual beauty, to which he addresses one of his finest poems, is the most distinct name of the power which he worships. Thy light alone, he exclaims—

> Thy light alone, like mist on mountains driven,
> Or music by the night wind sent
> Through strings of some still instrument,
> Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
> Gives peace and truth to life's unquiet dream.

In presence of such speculations, the ordinary mass of mankind will be content with declaring that the doctrine,

if it can be called a doctrine, is totally unintelligible. The ideal world is upon this vein so hopelessly dissevered from the real, that it can give us no consolation. If life is a dream, the dream is the basis of all we know, and it is small comfort to proclaim its unreality. A truth existing all by itself in a transcendental vacuum entirely unrelated to all that we call fact, is a truth in which we can find very small comfort. And upon this matter I have no desire to differ from the ordinary mass of mankind. In truth, Shelley's creed means only a vague longing, and must be passed through some more philosophical brain before it can become a fit topic for discussion.

But the fact of this unintelligibility is by itself an explanation of much of Shelley's poetical significance. When the excellent Godwin talked about perfectibility and the ultimate triumph of truth and justice, he was in no sort of hurry about it. He was a good deal annoyed when Malthus crushed his dreams, by recalling him to certain very essential conditions of earthly life. Godwin, he said in substance, had forgotten that human beings have got to find food and standing-room on a very limited planet, and to rear children to succeed them. Remove all restraints after the fashion proposed by Godwin, and they will be very soon brought to their senses by the hard pressure of starvation, misery, and vice. Godwin made a feeble ostensible reply, but, in practice, he was content to adjourn the realisation of his hopes for an indefinite period. Reason, he reflected, might be omnipotent, but he could not deny that it would take a long time to put forth its power. He had the strongest possible objections to any of those rough and ready modes of forcing men to be reasonable which had culminated in the revolution. So he gave up the trade of philosophising, and devoted himself to historical pursuits, and the preparation of wholesome literature for the infantile mind. To Shelley, no such calm abnegation of his old aims was possible.

He continued to assert passionately his belief in the creed of his early youth; but it became daily more difficult to see how it was to be applied to the actual men of existence. He might hold in his poetic raptures that the dreams were the only realities, and the reality nothing but a dream; but he, like other people, was forced to become sensible to the ordinary conditions of mundane existence.

The really exquisite strain in Shelley's poetry is precisely that which corresponds to his dissatisfaction with his master's teaching. So long as Shelley is speaking simply as a disciple of Godwin, we may admire the melodious versification, the purity and fineness of his language, and the unfailing and, in its way, unrivalled beauty of his aerial pictures. But it is impossible to find much real satisfaction in the informing sentiment. The enthusiasm rings hollow, not as suggestive of insincerity, but of deficient substance and reality. Shelley was, in one aspect, a typical though a superlative example of a race of human beings, which has, it may be, no fault except the fault of being intolerable. Had he not been a poet (rather a bold hypothesis, it must be admitted), he would have been a most insufferable bore. He had a terrible affinity for the race of crotchet-mongers, the people who believe that the world is to be saved out of hand by vegetarianism, or female suffrage, or representation of minorities, the one-sided, one-ideaed, shrill-voiced and irrepressible revolutionists. I say nothing against these particular nostrums, and still less against their advocates. I believe that bores are often the very salt of the earth, though I confess that the undiluted salt has for me a disagreeable and acrid savour. The devotees of some of Shelley's pet theories have become much noisier than they were when the excellent Godwin ruled his little clique. It is impossible not to catch in Shelley's earlier poetry, in "Queen Mab" and in the "Revolt of Islam,"

the apparent echo of much inexpressibly dreary rant which has deafened us from a thousand platforms. The language may be better; the substance is much the same.

This, which to some readers is annoyance, is to others a topic of extravagant eulogy. Not content with urging the undeniable truth that Shelley was a man of wide and generous sympathy, a detester of tyranny and a contemner of superstition, they speak of him as though he were both a leader of thought and a practical philanthropist. To make such a claim is virtually to expose him to an unfair test. It is simply ridiculous to demand for Shelley the kind of praise which we bestow upon the apostles of great principles in active life. What are we to say upon this hypothesis to the young gentleman who is amazed because vice and misery survive the revelations of Godwin, and whose reforming ardours are quenched—so far as any practical application goes—by the surprising experience that animosities fostered by the wrongs of centuries are not to be pacified by publishing a pamphlet or two about Equality, Justice, and Freedom, or by a month's speechification in Dublin? If these were Shelley's claims upon our admiration, we should be justified in rejecting them with simple contempt, or we should have to give the sacred name of philanthropist to any reckless impulsive schoolboy who thinks his elders fools and proclaims as a discovery the most vapid rant of his time. Admit that Shelley's zeal was as pure as you please, and that he cared less than nothing for money or vulgar comfort; but it is absurd to bestow upon him the praise properly reserved for men whose whole lives have been a continuous sacrifice for the good of their fellows. Nor can I recognise anything really elevating in those portions of Shelley's poetry which embody this shallow declamation. It is not the passionate war-cry of a combatant in a deadly grapple with the forces of evil, but the wail of a dreamer who has never troubled himself to

translate the phrases into the language of fact. Measured by this—utterly inappropriate—standard, we should be apt to call Shelley a slight and feverish rebel against the inevitable, whose wrath is little more than the futile, though strangely melodious, crackling of thorns.

To judge of Shelley in this mode would be to leave out of account precisely those qualities in which his unique excellence is most strikingly manifested. Shelley speaks, it is true, as a prophet; but when he has reached his Pisgah, it turns out that the land of promise is by no means to be found upon this solid earth of ours, or definable by degrees of latitude and longitude, but is an unsubstantial phantasmagoria in the clouds. It is in vain, too, that he declares that it is the true reality, and that what we call a reality is a dream. The transcendental world is—if we may say so—not really the world of archetypal ideas, but a fabric spun from empty phrases. The more we look at it the more clearly we recognise its origin; it is the refracted vision of Godwin's prosaic system seen through an imaginative atmosphere. But that which is really admirable is, not the vision itself, but the pathetic sentiment caused by Shelley's faint recognition of its obstinate unsubstantiality. It is with this emotion that every man must sympathise in proportion as his intellectual aspirations dominate his lower passions. Forgetting all tiresome crochets and vapid platitudes, we may be touched, almost in proportion to our own elevation of mind, by the unsatisfied yearning for which Shelley has found such manifold and harmonious utterance. There are moods in which every sensitive and philanthropic nature groans under the

> heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world.

Whatever our ideal may be, whatever the goal to which we hope to see mankind approximate, our spirits must often

flag with a sense of our personal insignificance, and of the appalling dead weight of multiform impediments which crushes the vital energies of the world, like Etna lying upon the Titan. This despair of finding any embodiment for his own ideal, of bridging over the great gulf fixed between the actual world of sin, and sorrow, and stupidity, and the transcendental world of joy, love, and pure reason, represents the final outcome of Shelley's imperfect philosophy, and gives the theme of his most exquisite poetry. The doctrine symbolised in the "Alastor" by the history of the poet who has seen in vision a form of perfect beauty, and dies in despair of ever finding it upon earth (he seems, poor man! to have looked for it somewhere in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan), is the clue to the history of his own intellectual life. He is happiest when he can get away from the world altogether into a vague region, having no particular relation to time or space; to the valleys haunted by the nymphs in the "Prometheus;" or the mystic island in the "Epipsychidion," where all sights and sounds are as the background of a happy dream, fitting symbols of sentiments too impalpable to be fairly grasped in language: or that "calm and blooming cove" of the lines in the Euganean hills.

The lyrics which we all know more or less by heart are but so many different modes of giving utterance to—

> The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow.

He is always dwelling upon the melancholy doctrine expressed in his last poem by the phrase that God has made good and the means of good irreconcilable. The song of the skylark suggests to him that we are doomed to "look before and after," and to "pine for what is not." Our sweetest songs (how should it be otherwise?) are those which tell of saddest thought. The wild commotion

in sea, sky, and earth, which heralds the approach of the south-west wind, harmonises with his dispirited restlessness, and he has to seek refuge in the vague hope that his thoughts, cast abroad at random like the leaves and clouds, may somehow be prophetic of a magical transformation of the world. His most enduring poetry is, in one way or other, a continuous comment upon the famous saying in "Julian and Maddalo," suggested by the sight of his fellow-Utopian, whose mind has been driven into madness by an uncongenial world.

> Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong;
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

Some poets suffer under evils of a more tangible kind than those which tormented Shelley; and some find a more satisfactory mode of escape from the sorrows which beset a sensitive nature. But the special beauty of Shelley's poetry is so far due to the fact that we feel it to be the voice of a pure and lofty nature, however crude may have been the form taken by some of his unreal inspiration.

GRAY AND HIS SCHOOL

A REMARK is every now and then made about Gray by somebody who has just been reading his charming letters. Gray, it is announced, was one of the first prophets of the true faith, or, as others call it, the modern superstition, of which mountains are the temples and Alpine clubs form the congregations. Their creed may be compressed into the single article that a love of mountains is the first of the cardinal virtues. To that doctrine, with some slight reservations, I yield a very hearty assent and consent; and I am glad to reckon Gray amongst its sound adherents. A mountainous country alone, he says, can furnish truly picturesque scenery. His early enthusiasm for the Chartreuse, his admiration in later years of the Vale of Keswick and the Pass of Killiecrankie, are symptoms of an orthodoxy creditable, because rarer, in his time than our own. But, though Gray shared the sentiment which was then growing up, it would be absurd to attribute to him any influence in its propagation. His descriptive letters are admirable, and show that he had a true eye for scenery; but they were not published till after his death, and certainly his "Life and Writings," clipped and docked by the precise Mason, was not the kind of book to generate a new enthusiasm. The real glory of revealing to mankind the new pleasure must be given—so far as it can be given to any individual writers—to men like Rousseau, whose passionate rhetoric made the love of nature a popular watchword, and Saussure, who first showed a thorough

appreciation of the glories of the Alps. But in England, and not in England alone, even Rousseau was, in this respect, eclipsed by Ossian. The general estimate of those singular poems, considered as descriptive of a mountainous region, coincides, I imagine, with that of Wordsworth. The mountains of Ossian are mere daubs, vague abstractions of mist and gloom, gigantesque unrealities which speak of anything but first-hand impressions of actual scenery. You may read through Ossian—if you can read through it at all—without gaining any more distinct impressions of Highland scenery than you would have received in the Highlands themselves any time since last November. But the extraordinary influence of Ossian upon the minds of MacPherson's contemporaries is a matter of history. When Goethe went to Switzerland, he evidently considered it the correct thing to have passages from Ossian at his fingers' ends for application to the Alps; it was the mountaineer's text-book, to be quoted in Switzerland as a later generation quoted Byron or the present the writings of Mr. Ruskin. Gray was one of the earliest enthusiasts, and, though he had a critical qualm or two, was apparently more moved by the new poems than by any literary event of his time. He is "*extasié* with their infinite beauty," makes "a thousand inquiries" about their authenticity, and in one letter declares himself to be "cruelly disappointed" with the "Nouvelle Héloïse," and able to admire nothing but Fingal. He studies Croma (who now knows Croma even by name?), and picks out the finest phrase in it as though he were criticising a book of the "Iliad."

The Ossian fever was symptomatic of a widely spread sentiment or fashion, due to causes far more general than the influence of any individual. It would be easy enough to show that worshippers of the picturesque had discovered the chief beauties of England before Gray wrote his letters. The tourist was already abroad. When Gray visited

Gordale Scar, in Craven, he already found landscape-painters settled at the neighbouring inn and preparing views for the engraver. The reader of that maddest of books, "John Buncle," may remember that the hero contrives at one place to emerge out of a mysterious cavern in the mountains of Westmoreland. He observes on the occasion that the Vale of Keswick is considered to offer the finest views in England, and that they were, in truth, finer than even the Rev. Dr. Dalton had been able to make them appear in his descriptive poem. Yet Buncle thinks that Keswick is surpassed by the "shaded fells" in the neighbourhood (apparently) of Ambleside, and that the cascades there are superior to "dread Lodore." The "Rev. Dr. Dalton" appears to have published his poem —a poem, I am sorry to say, unfamiliar to me—in 1755, some years before Gray's visit. But it is needless to enlarge upon this point. It is clear enough, from many symptoms, that the love of picturesque scenery was becoming fashionable in the middle of the century, and that Gray, as a man of taste, was amongst the first to feel the impulse.

The whole matter is, perhaps, of less importance than is sometimes attached to it. There is, after all, a good deal in Macaulay's common-sense explanation of the phenomenon—that a love of mountain scenery means simply the formation of good roads and comfortable inns in mountain districts. But Gray's taste in this respect is at least significant as to Gray's own position. His contempt for Rousseau and his love of Ossian are inversions of the judgment of later times; for no one would now deny the power of Rousseau, or find much pleasure—unless possessed by some antiquarian or patriotic mania —in the epics of the mythical bard. And yet we can see that Gray represents a vein of sentiment allied to some modern modes of thought, and generally regarded as antipathetic to the spirit of his own time. With all his popularity, he appears to be an isolated phenomenon

Everybody knows his poetry by heart. The "Elegy" has so worked itself into the popular imagination that it includes more familiar phrases than almost any poem of equal length in the language. The "Bard" and the lines upon Eton have become so hackneyed as perhaps to acquire a certain tinge of banality. If few English poets have written so little, none certainly has written so little that has fallen into oblivion. And yet, though Gray is in this sense the most popular poet of his day, though he is more read than Young, or Thomson, or Collins, or Goldsmith, or many others, we do not think of him as stamping his image upon the time. He stands apart. His poetry is taken to be like an oasis in the desert; it is a sudden spring of perennial freshness gushing out in the midst of that dreary didactic, argumentative, monotonous current of versification poured forth by the imitators of Pope. He never used Pope's measure for serious purposes, except in one fine fragment—the least read of his poems—and is, as it were, an outsider in the literature of the time. And yet, again, it must be remembered that Wordsworth picked him out for special condemnation as the worst offender in the use of conventional language. He definitely accepted and has enlarged upon the theory which Wordsworth attempted to upset—that poetry should use a language differing from that of common life. Indeed, he gets upon stilts as deliberately and consciously as any poet of the day, and is nervously sensitive to the risk of a lapse into the vernacular.

It would be easy to give a paradoxical turn to these remarks, and to show how Gray was at once the opponent and the representative of the poetical creed of his day. The puzzle, such as it is, arises from our habit of absurdly exaggerating the difference between ourselves and our grandfathers, and speaking as if everybody was "artificial" in the reign of Pope and "natural" in the reign of Wordsworth. No two words in the language cover more

confusion of thought than those famous phrases. It would be easy enough to twist them so as to prove that Wordsworth was more artificial than Pope, quite as clearly as the opposite is so often demonstrated; and, for my part, I am fully convinced that there was just as much human nature and as little affectation in the days of Queen Anne as in those of Victoria or in those of Elizabeth. The contrast usually drawn has, I doubt not, an important meaning; but it is so obscured by the vague talk about "nature" that I never see the word without instinctively putting myself on my guard against some bit of slipshod criticism or sham philosophy. I heartily wish that the word could be turned out of the language. Though that, alas! is impossible, we may try to avoid the misleading associations which it continually introduces. Gray, at any rate, was a human being who liked looking at trees and hills as much as anybody does now; and he certainly succeeded in writing some verses which concentrate into a couple of pages a depth of genuine emotion such as would furnish whole volumes of modern verbiage. It is another question whether he ought to be called a natural or an artificial poet.

In the first place, however, it may be observed that Gray was not so solitary a phenomenon as we might at first sight fancy. He never entered the circle of literary men who lived in London, and who, in the later part of his career, acknowledged Johnson as their dictator. He shrank from the roughness of the "great bear," who, in his turn, seems to have despised Gray as a literary fop—a finikin and affected spinner of verses, who tried to be grand and succeeded only in being pompous and obscure. Gray, in his quiet cloister, led the life of a recluse and followed his own fancies with little direct reference to the public opinion of accepted dispensers of literary reputation. But no man is really independent of his time, and Gray had his allies and his followers. Amongst them were men

still worth remembering, though all of them, like Gray himself, stood more or less apart from the main current of literature. In one of his early letters he speaks of the Odes just published by two young authors, who "both deserve to last some years, but will not." Collins, the first of these, has lasted, though destined to an early death, and scarcely more voluminous than Gray himself. Collins, like Gray, was sensitive and solitary, though in a still more morbid degree. It is recorded of him—and I know of no similar case except that of Landor in regard to "Pericles and Aspasia"—that he repaid his publisher for the loss incurred by his Odes. It is, perhaps, not irrelevant to add that his mind soon gave symptoms of approaching imbecility. The other young poet was Joseph Warton, still remembered for his essay on Pope, the elder brother of Thomas Warton, the historian of poetry; and the two brothers were the heads of what was once called the school of the Wartons. The "school" was not a very large one, and the poems of both the brothers—though Thomas is held to be better than Joseph—are not amongst the things that have lasted. The influence of the Wartons, however, was very conspicuous in reviving the study of the earlier models of our literature. Joseph tried to persuade the world—unsuccessfully at the time—that Pope was inferior to Spenser; and his brother's history is a considerable landmark in that revival of interest in poetical antiquities indicated by such works as Percy's "Reliques," or by the forgeries of Chatterton and Macpherson. I might have quoted Joseph Warton's earliest poem (1740) to show that what is called the love of nature was by no means a novelty when Gray went to the lakes. It is enough to give the title—"The Enthusiast; or, The Lover of Nature"—and to observe that Warton wishes to seat himself on a "pinetopt precipice, abrupt and shaggy," and to listen to "Boreas' blasts" and the sounds of "hollow winds and everbeating waves," in the

most approved romantic fashion. Both brothers, too, have a taste for the "moss-grown spire and crumbling arch;" and Tom's best sonnet—one much admired by Lamb — is written on a blank leaf of Dugdale's "Monasticon," and expresses his delight in surveying the records of "cloister'd piety"—

> Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways
> Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers.

In another he wishes to know whether "his pipe can aught essay to reach the ear" of that "divine bard" Mr. Gray, for whose "Elegy" and "Bard" he expresses the warmest admiration.

The similarity of taste shown by the Wartons and Gray does not appear to have led to personal intercourse. They were divided by that broad, though to the outward world invisible, gulf which still separates Oxford from Cambridge. Gray's most enthusiastic disciple, Mason, had come under his influence at Cambridge, and his first performance led to a passage of arms with Tom Warton. Mason attacked the Jacobitism of Oxford in a poem called "Isis," stating, of course in a purely poetical sense, that Oxford men held "infernal orgies" to the foes of freedom. Warton replied in verses which Mason admitted to be better than his own. Modesty, however, was not Mason's strong point. Years afterwards, when riding into Oxford, he remarked that he was glad that it was already dark; otherwise, as he intimated, a mob would naturally have gathered to avenge his insults to the University. Mason's odes and choruses are so obviously an echo of Gray's that one is rather surprised to find Gray praising them in language which implies that he was not aware of his responsibility. Mason himself was cordially proud of the relationship, though he took amazing liberties as an editor of his master's letters, and occasionally gave himself airs of equality, or even patronage, which strike one

as a little absurd. A more distant, but perhaps still more enthusiastic, admirer of Gray was Beattie, whose early odes (which he judiciously endeavoured to suppress) are feebler echoes than Mason's of the same model, and who reverently submitted his best poem, the "Minstrel," to Gray's correction, and, more wonderful to relate, accepted one or two of his critic's emendations. And, finally, we must include in the school of Gray the man whose levity and coxcombry has blinded many readers to his very remarkable ability. Horace Walpole, who quarrelled with Gray as with many others of his friends, for a time, and who, unlike Gray, was thoroughly immersed in the central current of London society, was no poet, but was in thorough sympathy with Gray's antiquarian tastes, and by the "Castle of Otranto" and the sham Gothic of Strawberry Hill did more than profounder antiquarians to restore an interest in mediæval art.

The names thus brought together, to which others might of course be added, give a sufficient indication of the general tendencies of what I have called the school of Gray. They did not form a clique, like most schools, for they lived in remote regions, and most of them showed the touchiness and even sensibility which is rubbed off by the friction of large societies. Tom Warton, who was certainly sociable enough in a fashion, was buried at Oxford for nearly fifty years. Gray was so secluded in his Cambridge cloister that the young men made a rush to see him in later years—leaving their dinners, it is said; but that is scarcely credible—when he appeared by some rare accident in the college walks. Beattie stuck with equal persistence to his college in Aberdeen, and could not be induced even to take a professorship in Edinburgh, being afraid, apparently, that his "Essay on Truth" would expose him to unpleasantness from the more metropolitan circle which admired and respected his antagonist Hume. The alarm, indeed, was more

reasonable than Mason's alarm about Oxford, for the essay was not only vehement in its abuse, but had succeeded in making a great stir in the world. Mason, again, fixed himself in his Yorkshire living and his canonry, emerging only at intervals to pay a few visits to his aristocratic friends. And even Walpole made a kind of sham cloister at Strawberry Hill, and, though a man of the world, a gossip, and a politician, was as irritable and uneasy a companion, as the most retired of hermits. The great movements of thought generally spread, it is supposed, from the metropolitan centres, where intellectual activity is stimulated by the constant collision of eager and excited minds. But a new taste may make its appearance in the corners to which sensitive men retire from the uncongenial atmosphere of the world, and cultivate at their ease what is first an individual crotchet and afterwards develops into a fashionable amusement.

Gray, beyond all doubt, was the one man of genius of the school after the early death of Collins, for it would be strained to give a higher name than talent even to Horace Walpole's remarkable intellectual vivacity. Tom Warton's biographer (it is impossible to speak of Thomas) has drawn an elaborate parrallel, in the proper historical fashion, between his hero and Gray. They were both dons, professors, students of antiquities, lovers of nature and of the romantic, composers of odes, and so forth. The parallel contains a good deal of truth, but it is consistent with an amusing contrast. Tom Warton was the thoroughly jovial, undignified don of the period. His poetry—even if his "Triumph of Isis," be superior to Mason's "Isis," and his sonnets deserve some praise in a century barren of sonnets—is not generally refreshing; the poor man had to construct some of those fanciful pieces of verse which laureates in those days were bound to manufacture for the sovereign's birthday, and one

cannot glance at them (nobody can read them) without profound sympathy. But his humorous verses have still a pleasant ring about them. There is a contagion in the enthusiasm with which he celebrates the virtues of Oxford ale. When he imagines himself discommuned for his indulgence, and unable even to get longer "tick" at the pothouse, he daringly compares himself to Adam exiled from Paradise. In another poem we have the characteristic triumph of the steady don, who has stuck to a bachelor life, over the misguided victim to matrimony and a college living. Thus will the poor fellow lament as butchers' bills and school fees become heavier year by year:—

> Why did I sell my college life
> (He cries) for benefice and wife?
> Return, ye days when endless pleasure
> I found in reading or in leisure,
> When calm around the common room
> I puffed my daily pipe's perfume,
> Rode for a stomach, and inspected
> At annual bottlings corks selected,
> And din'd untaxed, untroubled, under
> The portrait of our pious founder!

These of course are youthful productions; but, if all tales be true, the tastes described did not die out. Once, it is said, Warton's presence was required on some grand public function. The Professor was not to be found till an ingenious person suggested that a drum and fife should be sent through the streets performing a jovial and Jacobite tune; and before long the sweet notes enticed Warton from a public-house, pipe in mouth and with rumpled bands, to be miserably deceived in his hopes of fun. More creditable, and apparently more authentic, anecdotes relate how he took part in the boyish pranks of his brother's pupils at Winchester, and once at least composed a copy of Latin verses for a youthful companion, and insisted upon taking the half-crown which had been offered as

a reward for their excellence before the mild imposture was detected.

Most men grow tired of pipes and ale and the jolly bachelor life of common rooms soon after they have put on their master's hood. In the old days, before commissions and reform, when the Universities were more frequently regarded as a permanent retreat for men who could find a pipe a sufficient substitute for a wife, such jolly fellows as Warton formed a larger part of the college society. Most of them, however, were duller dogs than Tom Warton, who, with all his enjoyment of such heavy festivities, managed to write some laborious books. A proud, fastidious, and exquisitely sensitive man like Gray looked upon the whole scene with infinite contempt and scorn. It does not appear to be very clearly made out why he should have resided permanently at Cambridge, except for the sake of the libraries. Apparently he had resented some of Walpole's supercilious conduct, and possibly conduct which deserves a harsher name; for it is said that Walpole opened a letter addressed to Gray in the expectation of finding some disrespectful notice of himself. Anyhow, Gray erased Walpole from his list of friends, though he consented to resume acquaintanceship. He might previously have condescended to accept some of the appointments which Walpole could have easily procured during his father's ministry. But the father was turned out of office whilst the son was a discarded friend, and Gray, unwilling to enter the struggle of professional life, settled down at the University, though he always regarded it and its inhabitants with unqualified contempt. Gray—as his letters prove—had a very keen sense of humour, and when he chose could put a very sharp edge to his tongue. He let his fellow-residents know that he thought them fools—an opinion which they were perverse enough to resent. The poem with which he greeted Cambridge on first returning from his travels,

headed a "Hymn to Ignorance," is a curious contrast to Warton's enthusiastic "Triumph of Isis."

> Hail, horrors, hail! ye ever gloomy bowers,
> Ye Gothic fanes and antiquated towers,
> Where rushy Camus' slowly winding flood
> Perpetual draws his humid train of mud—

is the opening of his uncomplimentary address to his *alma mater*. "At the very time," says Parr, in that style of delicious pomposity which smells of his immortal wig, "in which Mr. Gray spoke so contemptuously of Cambridge, that very University abounded in men of erudition and science, with whom the first scholars would not have disdained to converse; and who shall convict me of exaggeration when I bring forward the names" of the immortal so-and-so? The names include, it is true, some which have still a claim upon our respect—Bentley, Waterland, and Conyers Middleton, for example—but the most eminent were just dead or dying when Gray came into residence, and dignified heads of houses, like Bentley and Waterland, were in a seventh heaven of dignity, quite inaccessible to the youthful poet. It does not now appear that it can ever have been a great privilege to live in the same town with "Provost Snape," "Tunstall the public orator," or "Asheton of Jesus." Gray knew something of Middleton (who died in 1750, when Gray was 34), and speaks of his house as the only one in Cambridge where it was easy to converse; and he takes care to add that even Middleton was only an "old acquaintance," which is but an indifferent likeness of a friend. He made a few intimacies—chiefly with younger men, like Mason, who soon ceased to be residents—but the bulk of the University was in his eyes contemptible; and, on the whole, contemporary evidence would lead to the conclusion that his opinion was not far wrong. Cambridge had possessed very eminent men in the days of Bentley, Newton, Waterland, Sherlock, and Middleton, and it has had very

eminent men at a later period, but Gray was himself almost the only man in the middle of the eighteenth century whom anybody need care to remember now. At any rate, there was a large proportion of that ale-drinking, tobacco-smoking element amongst the jolly fellows of the combination room, whose society Warton might relish, but whom Gray regarded with supreme contempt. The fellow-commoners appear by his account to have exceeded in audacity the young gentlemen who lately exhibited their sense of playful humour by defacing certain statues at Oxford. The wits of an earlier day put poor Gray in fear of his life. He ordered a rope ladder, to be able to escape from his rooms in case they set the college on fire; and, if I remember the tradition rightly, they set a "booby trap" for the poet, and, raising an alarm, induced him to descend his rope ladder into a water-butt. Anyhow, poor Gray was driven from Peterhouse to Pembroke, and there abstracted his mind from the academical noises by a course of study which, according to his admirers (but who shall answer for the admirers?), made him profoundly familiar with every branch of learning except mathematics. Meanwhile his appearance and manners were calculated to intensify the mutual dislike between himself and his rougher surroundings. His rooms were scrupulously neat, with mignonette in the windows and flowers elegantly planted in china vases; he spoke little in general society, and compiled biting epigrams or classical puns with a derisory application to his special associates. In short, in outward appearance he belonged to the class fop or *petit-maître*, mincing, precise, affected, and as little in harmony with the rowdy fellow-commoners as Hotspur's courtier with the rough soldiers on the battle-field.

The want of harmony between Gray and his surroundings goes far to explain his singular want of fertility. In fact, we may say—without any want of respect for a venerable institution—that Gray could hardly have found

a more uncongenial residence. Cambridge boasts of its poets; and a University may be well proud which has had, amongst many others, such inmates as Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Gray, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Tennyson. If a sceptic chooses to ask what share the University can claim in stimulating the genius of those illustrious men, the answer might be difficult. But, in any case, no poet except Gray loved his University well enough to become a resident. If it were not for Gray, I should be inclined to guess that a poet don was a contradiction in terms. The reason is very obvious to any one who has enjoyed the latter title. It is simply that no atmosphere can be conceived more calculated to stimulate that excessive fastidiousness which all but extinguished Gray's productive faculties. He might wrap himself in simple contempt for the ale-drinking vanity of the don. He could, in the old college slang, "sport his oak" and despise their railings, and even the shouts of "Fire!" of the worthy fellow-commoners. But a poet requires some sympathy, and, if possible, some worshippers. The inner circle of Gray's intimates was naturally composed of men fastidious like himself, and all of them more or less critics by profession. The reflection would be forced upon his mind, whenever he thought of publishing, What will be thought of my poems by Provost Snape, and Mr. Public-Orator Tunstall, and Asheton of Jesus, and those other luminaries whom Dr. Parr commemorates? And undoubtedly their first thought would be to show their claim to literary excellence by picking holes in their friend's compositions. They would rejoice greatly when they could show that faculties sharpened by the detection of false quantities and slips of grammar in their pupils' Latin verses were equal to the discovery of solecisms and defective rhymes in the work of a living poet. Gray's extreme sensitiveness to all such quillets of criticism is marked in every poem he wrote. Had he been forced to

fight his way in literature he would have learnt to swallow his scruples and take the chance in a free give-and-take struggle for fame. In a country living he might have forgotten his tormentors and have married a wife to secure at least one thoroughly appreciative and intelligent admirer. But to be shut up in a small scholastic clique, however little he might respect their individual merits, to have the chat of combination rooms ever in his ears, to be worried by bands of professional critics at every turn, was as though a singing bird should build over a wasp's nest. The "Elegy" and the "Odes" just struggled into existence, though much of them was written before he settled down as a resident; but Gray, like many another don of great abilities, finished but a minute fragment of the work of which he more or less contemplated the execution. The books contemplated but never carried out by men in his position would make a melancholy and extensive catalogue. The effect of these influences upon his work is palpable to every reader of Gray. No English poet has ever given more decisive proof that he shared that secret of clothing even an obvious thought in majestic and resounding language, which we naturally call Miltonic. Though he modestly asserts that he inherits

> Nor the pride nor ample pinion
> That the Theban eagle bear,
> Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air,

yet we feel that none of his contemporaries—perhaps none of his successors—could have equalled, in dignity and richness of style, the noble passage in which that phrase occurs. And yet we must also feel that if his "car," as he says of Dryden's, is borne by "coursers of ethereal race," they are constantly checked before they can get into full career. He takes flight as if the azure deep were the natural home in which he could sail

suspended like the eagle without perceptible effort. But the wings droop before they are well unfurled, and the magnificent strain ceases without giving the promised satisfaction. Even the "Elegy" flags a little towards the end; the "hoary-headed swain" becomes rather flat in his remarks, and the concluding epitaph has just a little too much twang of epigrammatic smartness. I sometimes agree, indeed, with Wolfe that it was a far greater achievement to write the "Elegy" than to storm the heights of Abram, and then hold (though I also incline to a different opinion) that only a soldier, or author, or civilian of ultra-military enthusiasm could suppose that such a comparison involved condescension on the side of the general. Gray and his personal admirers seem to have been annoyed at the preference given to this above his other writings. It proved, so he argued, that the stupid public cared for the subject instead of the art; that they liked the "Elegy" as they liked Blair's "Grave," and would have liked it as well if the same thoughts had been expressed in prose. Undoubtedly the public will always refuse to make that distinction between form and matter which seems so important to the critical mind. It is not, however, that they are unaffected by the artistic skill, but that they are affected unconsciously. The meditations of Blair, of Young, and of Hervey, equally popular in their day, have fallen into disrepute for want of the exquisite felicity of language which has preserved the "Elegy." It is a commonplace thing to say that the power of giving freshness to commonplace is amongst the highest proofs of poetical genius. One reason is, apparently, that it is so difficult to extract the pure and ennobling element from the coarser materials in which any obvious truth comes to be embedded. The difficulty of feeling rightly is as great as the difficulty of finding a worthy utterance of the feeling. Everybody may judge of the difficulty of Gray's task who will attend

to what passes at a funeral. On such an occasion one is inclined to fancy, *à priori*, mourners will drop all affectation and speak poetically because they will speak from their hearts; but, as a matter of fact, there is no occasion on which there is generally such a lavish expenditure of painful and jarring sentiment, of vulgarity, affectation, and insincerity; and thus Gray's meditations stand out from other treatments of a similar theme not merely by the technical merits of the language, but by the admirable truth and purity of the underlying sentiment. The temptation to be too obtrusively moral and improving, to indulge in inappropriate epigram, in sham feeling, in idle sophistry, in strained and exaggerated gloominess, or even on occasion to heighten the effect by inappropriate humour, is so strong with most people that Gray's kindness and delicacy of feeling, qualities which were perceptible to the despised public, must be regarded as contributing quite as much to the success of the "Elegy" as the technical merits of form, which, moreover, can hardly be separated from the merits of substance.

Indeed, when we come to the other odes which have similar qualities of mere style, we are at no loss to explain the difference of reception. The beautiful "Ode upon Eton," for example, comes into conflict with one's common-sense. We know too well that an Eton boy is not always the happy and immaculate creature of Gray's fancy; and one feels that the reflections upon his probable degradation imply a fit of temporary ill-humour in the poet, supervening, no doubt, upon a deeper vein of melancholy. The sentiment is too splenetic to be pleasing. The "Bard," which has, I suppose, been recited by schoolboys as frequently as the "Elegy," is a more curious indication of the peculiarities of Gray's method of composition. Mason gives an account of the remarkable transformation which it underwent. Gray's first intention, it appears, was that the bard should declare

prophetically that poets should never be wanting "to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression." Undoubtedly this gives a meaning to the ode worthy of the beginning. The victim could not make a more effective retort. But, unluckily, when the bard had got into full swing, it struck him that the facts were not what his theory required. Shakespeare, says Mason, liked Falstaff in spite of his vices; Milton censured tyranny in prose; Dryden was a court parasite; Pope, a Tory; and Addison, "though a Whig," was a poor poet. The poor bard was therefore in the miserable position—one of the most wretched known to humanity—of a man who has begun a fine speech and does not see his way out of it. If Gray had taken a wider view of the poet's true function, he might still have found some embodiment for his thoughts; for English poetry, though it may not have been Whiggish, may certainly be regarded as the fullest expression of the more liberal and humanising conceptions of the world which have to struggle against the pedantry and narrowness of prosaic professional theorisers. But the bard required sound Whig precedent to point his moral, and it was not forthcoming. Consequently he has to take refuge in the very scanty consolation afforded by the bare reflection that Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton would begin to write some time after the descendants of a Welshman had ascended the throne. One would not grudge any satisfaction to an unfortunate gentleman just about to commit suicide; but one must admit that he was easily pleased.

This want of any central idea converts the ode into a set of splendid fragments of verse, which scarcely hold together. Contemporary critics complained grievously of its "obscurity"—a phrase which seems ill placed to us who know by experience what obscurity may really mean. An obscurity removable by a slight knowledge of English

history and a recollection of the fact that Richard II. is said to have been starved instead of stabbed, as in Shakespeare, by Exton, is not of a very grievous kind; but the absence of any intelligible motive in the bard's final rupture is more serious. A poet surely might have acted upon the *tant pis pour les faits* theory, and proceeded to make his general assertion without waiting for confirmatory evidence. A writer who, like Gray, secretes his poetry line by line and spreads the process over years, seems to fall into the same faults which are more frequently due to haste. He pores over his conceptions so long that he becomes blind to defects obvious to a fresh observer, and rather misses his point, as he introduces minute alterations without noticing their effect on the context. One wonders how a man of Gray's exquisite perception could have introduced the lines—

> And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old
> In bearded majesty appear—

without seeing that we are only saved by a comma, and a comma easily neglected, from assuming that a Julia Pastrana would have been a usual phenomenon at the court of Elizabeth. Correction continued after the freshness of the impression has died away is apt to lead to such oversight.

The learned and fastidious don shows through the inspired "bard" by many equally unmistakable indications. His editor, Mitford, collected a number of parallel passages which curiously indicate the degree in which his mind was saturated with recollections of poetical literature. It seems to be now considered as unjustifiable plagiarism for a poet to assimilate the phrases of his predecessors. We may, indeed, find abundant proofs of familiarity with Shakespeare in Shelley, and in more recent writers; but they are generally of the unconscious kind, and would otherwise be avoided as sins against

originality. The poets of the last century, such as Goldsmith, and especially Pope, had no scruples in the matter. Their work did not profess to be a sudden and spontaneous inspiration. It was a slow elaboration, with which it was perfectly allowable to interweave any quantity of previously manufactured material so long as the juncture was not palpable. Gray's adaptations seem sometimes to make the whole tissue of his poetry. He owns to an unconscious appropriation from Green (author of the "Spleen") of the main thought of his "Ode to the Spring," the comparison of men to ephemeral insects. But everywhere he is giving out phrases which he has previously assimilated. So in the very spirited translation from the Norse, "Uprose the king of men with speed," we have a verse from the "Allegro"—"Right against the Eastern Gate"—cropping up naturally in quite a fresh connection. A single phrase seems to combine several semi-conscious recollections. The words in the "Bard" "dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart" come from Shakespeare, and the preceding "dear as the light that visits those sad eyes" are perhaps from Otway. But it is useless to accumulate instances of so palpable a process.

It is only in character, again, that Gray should have clung to a peculiar dictum, as he would have insisted upon wearing his proper academical costume in a performance in the senate-house. He would no more have dropped into Wordsworth's vernacular than he would have smoked a pipe in one of Warton's pot-houses. Wordsworth considered this dignity to be unnatural pomposity; and undoubtedly the language is frequently conventional and "unnatural," and a stumbling-block of offence to the generation which gave up wigs. Equally annoying was Gray's immense delight in semi-allegorical figures. We have whole catalogues of abstract qualities scarcely personified. Ambition, bitter Scorn, grinning

Infamy, Falsehood, hard Unkindness, keen Remorse, and moody Madness are all collected in one stanza not exceptional in style—beings which to us are almost as offensive as the muse whom he has pretty well ceased to invoke, though he still appeals to his lyre. This fashion reached its culminating point in the celebrated invocation somewhere recorded by Coleridge, "Inoculation, heavenly maid!" The personified qualities are a kind of fading "survival"—ghosts of the old allegorical persons who put on a rather more solid clothing of flesh and blood with Spenser, and with Gray scarcely putting in a stronger claim to vitality than is implied in the use of capital letters. The "muses" were nearly extinct, and in Pope's time the gods and goddesses had come to be regarded as so much "machinery" invented by Homer to work his epic poetry. They were, in fact, passions and qualities in masquerade; and they therefore found it very easy, in the next generation, to drop even this thin disguise, and fit themselves for poetic usage, not by taking the name of a pagan deity, but by a simple typographical device.

What would Gray have done under more congenial circumstances if he produced such inimitable fragments under such adverse conditions—when his learning threatened to choke his fire, when his exquisite taste was pampered with excessive fastidiousness, and his temper and position alienated him from the most vigorous intellectual movement of the day? Perhaps—for the region of the might-have-been is boundless—he would have produced a masterpiece of the "grand style," worthy of a place by Milton's finest work; or, as possibly, he would have done nothing. It is an amusing exercise of the imagination to place our favourite authors in different countries and centuries, and to trace their hypothetical development a century earlier. I fancy that Gray would have buried himself still more profoundly

from the political convulsions which attracted Milton's sterner and more active spirit; he would have studied Plotinus and Maimonides, and found sympathetic companionship amongst the Cambridge Platonists; he would have written some fragment of semi-mystical reverie, showing stupendous learning and philosophic breadth of thought, and possibly have composed some divine poems for the admiration of Henry More or John Norris. Warton, doubtless, would at any period have enjoyed Oxford ale, and joined in the jolly song, "Back and side go bare, go bare;" he would have sometimes accompanied Burton on the rambles where he was thrown into fits of laughter by listening to the ribaldry of the bargees at the bridge end; he would still have been an antiquarian, and his note-book might have contributed quaint scraps of learning to the "Anatomy of Melancholy." Mason, anxious not to sink the man of the world in the country parson, would have racked his unfortunate brains for conceits worthy to be placed beside the most fashionable compositions of Donne or Cowley. Horace Walpole would, of course, have been at any time the prince of gossips; he would have kept most judiciously on the safe side in the most dangerous revolutions, and have come just near enough to collect the most interesting scandals in the courts of the Stuarts; but probably his lively intellect would have led him to drop in occasionally at the meetings of the infant Royal Society, and to have been one of the early cultivators of a taste for ancient marbles or a judicious patron of Vandyke. It is, perhaps, harder to assign the precise place in our own days, when the separate niches are not so distinctly marked off, and even the Universities scarcely afford a satisfactory refuge for the would-be recluse; but at least one may assume that each of them would have been æsthetic to his fingers' ends, and have been thoroughly on a level with the last new developments of taste, whether for mediæval architecture

or the art of the Renaissance, or that style which is called after Queen Anne. The snapdragon which Cardinal Newman saw from his windows of Trinity, and took for the emblem of his perpetual residence in the University, was probably flourishing when Warton's residence in the same college ceased; and Warton, in spite of that love of ale which is perhaps more prominent than it should be in our impressions of his character, would beyond all doubt have been a member of that school of which his successor was the greatest ornament, and which has given a new meaning to the old phrase High Church. It was amongst the Wartons and their friends that the word "Gothic," used by earlier writers as a simple term of abuse, came to have a more appreciative meaning; they were the originators of the so-called romanticism made popular by Scott, and which counts for so much in the Anglo-Catholic development.

The paradox, in short, with which I started comes simply to this: that Gray and his friends were eclectics. This taste for the "Gothic" was a kind of happy thought, a lucky discovery made by men feeling round rather vaguely for a new mode of literary and artistic enjoyment —not quite content with the exceedingly comfortable and respectable century in which they lived, and yet not clearly seeing how to improve upon it. Horace Walpole, the shrewdest of all and the least of a recluse, was, on one side, a thorough man of his time; he was a free-thinker of the Voltaire type; believed—so far as he believed in anything—in Pope's poetry and Locke's philosophy; he sneered at enthusiasm and sentimentalism, and at any revolutionary moment calculated directly or indirectly to deprive Horace Walpoles of comfortable sinecures. But he had a taste, and money to spend upon it; so he made Gothic chapels and halls of lath and plaster, played with antiquarian researches, and wrote a romance which was made of literary lath and

plaster to match the materials of Strawberry Hill. Gray's dilettanteism was far more serious and systematic, but it necessarily took the same direction. He did more than dabble in antiquarianism: he read with insatiable appetite; he became, I suppose, profound in Gothic architecture, so far as isolated efforts could make a man profound. But his attempts at putting his theory in practice were clearly of the Strawberry Hill kind. He instructs his friend to buy bits of plain coloured glass, and arrange the tops of his windows in a "mosaic of his own fancy," only observing that, to give them a "Gothic aspect," it will be enough to turn the fragments "cornerways." Then he manages to procure "stucco paper" at threepence a yard, which is "rather pretty and nearly Gothic," and apparently represents Gothic arches and niches. It will produce an awkward effect, as he admits, where the pattern has to be turned the wrong way; and, indeed, he is awake to the inadequacy of the crude revival. Painters, as he says, make objects which are more like goose pies than cathedrals. The new toy was still in a very imperfect and rickety state.

One of the quaintest illustrations of the Gothicism of that time is in Mason's "English Garden." It is a weary bit of didactic poetry, and a most amiable and lenient critic, Hartley Coleridge, pronounces it to be the dullest poem which he ever attempted to read. It is hard, says Coleridge, to suppose it "wholly destitute of beauties, especially" (why especially?) "as it consists of 2,423 lines of blank verse;" but he does not seem to have discovered any. Had the critic persevered to the end of the fourth book, he might at least have been rewarded by a smile at the author. Mason tries to enliven his performance by a story about a pattern man of taste and virtue, named Alcander, whose tragical sorrows are soothed by religion and landscape gardening. It is enough to notice his performances in the last capacity. Alcander, as his name

suggests, is an English country gentleman, possessed of an ancient mansion,

> Coeval with those rich cathedral fanes
> (Gothic ill-named) whose harmony results
> From disunited parts.

Alcander shows his taste by a restoration in the manner of the time. Let every structure, he proclaims,

> needful for a farm
> Arise in castle-semblance; the huge barn
> Shall with a mock portcullis awe the gate
> Where Ceres entering, o'er the flail-proof floor
> In golden triumph rides; some tower rotund
> Shall to the pigeons and their callow young
> Safe roost afford, and every buttress broad
> Whose proud projection seems a mass of stone
> Give space to stall the heifer and the steed.
> So shall each part, though turned to rural use,
> Deceive the eye with those bold feudal farms
> Which fancy loves to gaze on.

He afterwards adopts a similar method

> To hide the structure rude where Winter pounds
> In conic pit his congelations hoar;

concealing his ice-house and dairy behind a modern "time-struck abbey." Alcander thus displays those admirable qualities of head and heart which enable him to bear with resignation the melancholy death of a beloved object. He finally consoles himself by placing her monument in a sham hermitage. The Gothic revival of a century ago sounds absurd enough to our ears, and it must be confessed that our foolery is more systematic and scientific, as it is probably more destructive. Alcander, happily, did not "restore" his castle, though he surrounded it with those queer farm buildings and brand-new ruins. Pope, it seems, had set the fashion of landscape gardening on the little plot of ground which, as Horace Walpole tells us, he had "twisted and twirled, and rhymed and harmonised,

till it appeared two or three sweet little lawns, opening and opening beyond one another, the whole surrounded with thick, impenetrable woods." Mason, Spence, Shenstone, and other persons of literary note helped, according to their opportunities, to promote the revolt against the old-fashioned style in which, as Mason put it, Folly combined with Wealth.

> To plan that formal, dull, disjointed scene
> Which once was call'd a garden.

He denounces the stiff canals, the clipped yews and holly hedges, and the geometric patterns of "tonsile box" with the zeal of a reformer. The theory seems to be that a garden ought to look as if it were not a garden. The change of taste, however, was doubtless symptomatic of the growing "love of nature," though I do not presume to discuss its merits. It was a development parallel to the literary change implied in the renewed taste for old ballads, for archaic poetry, or what passed for such under the names of Ossian and Rowley, and for Elizabethan literature.

Such tastes, however significant of the advent of a literary revolution, did not imply any revolutionary purpose in their cultivators. If Gray loved Spenser, he was even more enthusiastic about Dryden, from whom he professed to have learnt the art of versification. Cowper tried to supersede Pope's Homer. Gray declared that nobody would ever translate Homer as well as Pope. Gray was as orthodox in his literary as in his philosophical profession of faith; and his most avowed disciple Mason was, on the whole, of the same persuasion. In Warton and Beattie there is clearly some anticipation of Scott's romanticism, but Mason's experiments were rather in the classical direction. His "English Garden" was his most ponderous and unsuccessful performance. In some other effort she showed a keenness of style, a causticity of satire,

which induced the late Mr. Dilke to suggest him (not quite seriously, I fancy) as a possible candidate for the questionable honour of being the real Junius. It would be difficult indeed to imagine that Junius could by any possibility have been a country clergyman, living for the greatest part of the year at a distance from the political gossip of the day, however much interested in the spread of sound Whig principles. It is amusing to read the correspondence between Mason and his two friends Gray and Walpole, and to note how the respectful disciple, reverently receiving from his teachers little hints of criticism—laudatory, it is true, for the most part, but also dashed with tolerably sharp sarcasm—gradually develops into the rather dandified clergyman, anxious to show that the man of the world is not altogether sunk in the rustic parson; that he is no pedant, but a man of taste, and capable of tagging his remarks with bits of fashionable French, and even of occasionally repaying in kind his correspondent's affluence of the latest scandals. Mason's clerical gown did not sit very well upon him, though he seems to have been conscientious and independent and not without some genuine kindliness of nature. But he always gives one the impression of being out of place in his cassock. It would not be easy to find a more quaint expression of the unprofessional turn of mind in a clergyman than a defence of Christianity in one of his sermons. "If," he says, "the British Constitution will not enable a man to dispense with religion, we must admit that nothing can;" and he proceeds to establish a proposition which certainly would not be considered as requiring defence in a modern pulpit—that even the Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights did not supersede the Gospels. His claims to be a conceivable Junius seem to depend chiefly upon the clever squib called "Heroic Epistle," which is an amusing burlesque of the architectural crotchets of Sir W. Chambers and implies a want of reverence for George III.

Mason took immense pains to conceal the authorship of this and some less successful sequels, and so far followed the steps of Junius; but it is impossible to fancy that the great pamphleteer would have made such a cackling over such a trifle, or have been so sensitive to the praises of his confidant Walpole.

Gray speaks of Mason's "insatiable reforming mouth," and remarks that he has no passions "except a little malice and revenge." There was a good deal of acidity in his nature, developed, perhaps, by his uncongenial position and by domestic trouble, if he had not the rancour and force which make a great satirist; but in earlier days Gray found in him a simple-minded and enthusiastic disciple, who read little or nothing, but wrote abundance, "and that with a design to make a fortune by it." His two poems "Elfrida" and "Caractacus" were fruits of this early fluency. They have been criticised elaborately by Hartley Coleridge, but belong, I think, to that kind and class of literature upon which serious criticism would be rather wasted. It is not that they are bad; rather they suggest an uncomfortable reflection upon the quantity of real talent, as well as conscientious effort, which may be thrown away in producing work unmistakably second-rate and void of genuine vitality. We can better estimate the extreme rarity and value of genius by measuring it against the achievements of remarkable cleverness. Hastily read, or read whilst still possessing the gloss of novelty, Mason's work might look like Gray's. Here, for example, is the first stanza of a chorus from "Caractacus," which Gray not only praised to Mason, but cites in one of his notes as a proof that sublime odes could still be written in English:—

> Hark! heard ye not yon footstep dread,
> That shook the earth with thund'ring tread?
> 'Twas Death. In haste
> The warrior past;

High towered his helmed head :
I mark'd his mail ; I mark'd his shield ;
I 'spyed the sparkling of his spear ;
I saw his giant arm the falchion wield ;
Wide wav'd the lickering blade, and fir'd the angry air.[1]

Longer quotation might be tiresome; but Mason continues to the end with all the manner of a genuine poet, and doubtless cheated himself as well as Gray into the impression that he had the real stuff in him. The effect is respectable at a little distance, though the work will not bear a moment's inspection.

The general design of the plays, however, is more to my purpose than the merits of their execution. At that time the worship of Shakespeare, though sometimes extravagant, had not become a mere slavish idolatry. It was still permitted to see spots in the sun, and not yet fashionable for poets to try to revive the Elizabethan style, though Mason made one feeble attempt at a play "on the English model." Gray, with his catholic taste, admired Racine, and began a play in imitation of "Britannicus;" and the faithful Mason decided that a "medium between the French and English taste would be preferable to either." He had also a fancy that the ancient chorus might be restored, so as at once to give greater opportunities for poetical descriptions and the graceful introduction of "moral reflections." Though Gray ridiculed his arguments pretty sharply, he stuck to his plan as obstinately as Sam Weller when insisting, in defiance of paternal remonstrances, upon a poetical conclusion to his love-letter. Accordingly, in "Elfrida" and "Caractacus," certain bands of British virgins and druids talk the twaddle and burst into the lyrical irrelevance which are the functions of a chorus. Mason had

[1] The last line is an emendation for "Courage was in his van and Conquest in his rear," a line still more *à la Gray*, but removed in compliance with a criticism of Gray's.

abundant self-complacency; and though his plays had only a moderate success, owing to the bad taste of the public, he felt that his ingenious eclecticisms combined the various merits of Sophocles, Racine, and Shakespeare. Unsuccessful authors may well invoke blessings on the man who invented conceit. But Mason, after all, writes like a cultivated scholar, with sensibility to poetic excellence, though without real poetic power; and if we laugh at his taste, our grandchildren will probably laugh with equal self-satisfaction at ours.

In truth, this fashion of writing plays not intended, or scarcely intended, for the stage, of which Mason was one of the first originators, is characteristic of the whole school. I will not argue a large question here, or deny that something may be said for the practice; and yet it seems as though a play which is not to be acted has a more than superficial resemblance to the feudal castles which were not meant for defence, and the abbeys in which there were to be no monks. The form is dictated by conditions which are no longer present to the writer's mind, and are therefore apt to be a mere encumbrance. If you build a portcullis to let in cows, not to exclude marauders, it is apt to become rather ludicrously unreal. If you know that your play is to be read and not to be seen, the whole dramatic arrangement is on the way to become a mere sham. It does not grow out of the poetical conception, but is fitted on to it in compliance with a fashion. Why bother yourself to make the actors tell a story, when it is simpler and easier to tell it yourself?

In this sense literature grows more "artificial" as it is encumbered with more dead forms having no significance except as remnants of extinct conditions. There was a time, we are told, when art was perfectly spontaneous, and the critic was happily not existent. People sang or recited by instinct, without asking how or why. That

golden age—if it ever existed since men were monkeys—had long passed away even in the beginning of modern literature. Spenser and Shakespeare, for example, probably thought about the principles of their art almost as much as their modern critics, and were very consciously trying experiments and devising new forms of expression. But as the noxious animal called a critic becomes rampant, we have a different phase, which seems to be illustrated by the case of Gray and his fellows. The distinction seems to be that the critic, as he grows more conceited, not only lays down rules for the guidance of the imaginative impulse, but begins to think himself capable of producing any given effect at pleasure. He has got to the bottom of the whole affair, and can tell you what is the chemical composition of a "Hamlet," or an "Agamemnon," or an "Iliad," and can therefore teach you what materials to select and how to combine them. He can give you a recipe for an epic poem, or for communicating the proper mediæval or classical flavour to your performance. If he is as clever a man as Mason, he will perhaps go a little further, and show not only how to extract the peculiar essence of a Racine or a Shakespeare, but how to mix the result so as to produce something better than either. In one respect he has clearly made an advance. He is beginning to appreciate the necessity of an historical study of different literary forms. In such quaint, old-fashioned criticism as Addison applied to Milton, where Longinus, and Aristotle, and the learned M. Bossu are invoked as final authorities about the "fable" and the "machinery" and the character of the hero, we perceive that the critic is still persuaded that there is one absolutely correct and infallible code of art, applicable in all times and places. Milton and Homer are regarded as belonging to the same class, and are to be judged by the same laws. The later critic, taking a wider survey and rummaging amongst the antiquarian stores to

discover any pearls hidden under Dryasdust's accumulations, began to see that there were many different types of art, each of which possessed its own charm and characteristic excellence. He scarcely saw at first that each form was also the outgrowth of a particular set of conditions, and could not be produced independently of them. It seemed easy to restore anything that struck him as picturesque or graceful. He could give the old ballad air by an arbitrary combination of bad spelling, or make his ruined abbey out of a scene-painter's materials.

This early race of critics had no direct hostility to their own century or to its early classicalism. They were not iconoclasts, but only adding some new idols to the old pantheon. They aimed at being men of finer and more catholic taste than their neighbours, but wished to extend the borders of orthodoxy, to repeal the anathema which had been pronounced upon the "Gothicism" and barbarism of our old authors, not to anathematise the existing order in revenge. They were quiet, orthodox, and substantially conservative, even if nominally Whiggish, and feared or detested revolutionary impulses of any kind from the bottom of their hearts. Such men as Mason or the Wartons tried literary experiments which are now of no great value, because they represent at best the attempts of a superficial connoisseur of talent. They did something by attracting interest to researches which produced greater results when carried on by more thorough workers in the same mine. But it is also true that they were amongst the first to fall into the blunders, since repeated on a more gigantic scale by successors, who have tried more systematically to galvanise extinct forms into a semblance of vitality.

Gray, the man of real poetic genius, was also, if his friends judged rightly, the most profound antiquarian and the most deeply read of the whole school. Many of his

critics have lamented the time which he spent in making elaborate tables of chronology, in studying genealogy and annotating Dugdale's "Monasticon," or Grosier's "History of the Chinese Dynasties," or the "Botany" of Linnæus, when he might have been writing more elegies. There is so much to regret in the world that one would not waste much lamentation upon might-have-beens. It is a thousand pities that Burns took to drink, that Byron quarrelled with his wife, that Shelley was drowned in a squall, and that Gray wasted intellect upon labours which were absolutely fruitless, but we cannot afford to sit down and cry over it all. We must take what we can get, and be thankful. But neither can one quite accept the optimist theory that Gray really did all that he could have done under different circumstances. The fire was all but choked by the fuel, and the cloisters of Pembroke acted as a tolerably effective extinguisher upon what was left. The peculiar merit of Gray is that he had force enough, though only at the cost of slow and laborious travail, to find an utterance for genuine emotion, which was enriched instead of being made unnatural by his varied culture. The critic in him never injured the quality, but only reduced the quantity, of his work. What little he left is so perfect in its kind, so far above any contemporary performances, because he never forgot, like some learned people, that the ultimate aim of the poet should be to touch our hearts by showing his own, and not to exhibit his learning, or his fine taste, or his skill in mimicking the notes of his predecessors. He could rarely cast aside his reserve, or forget his academical dignity enough to speak at all; but when he does speak he always shows that the genuine depth of feeling underlies the crust of propriety. He cannot drop, nor does he desire to drop, the conventionality of style, but he makes us feel that he is a human being before he is a critic or a don. He wears stately robes because it is an ingrained

habit, but he does not suppose that the tailor can make the man. In his letters this is as clear as in his poetry. His habitual reserve restrains him from sentimentalising, and he generally relieves himself by a pleasant vein of sub-acid humour. But now and then he speaks, as it were, shyly or half afraid to unbosom himself, and yet with a pathetic tenderness which conquers our sympathy. Such is the beautiful little letter to Mason on the death of his wife, or still more the letter in which he confides to his friend Nichols how he had "discovered a thing very little known, which is that in one's whole life one can never have more than a single mother." Sterne might have written a chapter of exquisite sentimentalising without approaching the pathetic charm of that single touch of the reserved and outwardly pedantic don. His utterance is wrung from him in spite of himself, and still half veiled by the quaintness of the phrase.

Gray's love of nature shows itself in the same way. He does not make poetical capital out of it, and indeed has an impression that it would be scarcely becoming. He would agree with Pope's contempt for "pure description." Fields and hills should only be admitted in the background of his dignified poetry, and just so far as they are obviously appropriate to the sentiment to be expressed. But when he does speak it is always with the most genuine feeling in every word. There is a charming little description of the Southampton Water and of a sunrise—he can "hardly believe" that anybody ever saw a sunrise before—which are as perfect vignettes as can be put upon paper within equal limits, worth acres of more pretentious word-painting. He rather despised Mason's gardening tastes, it seems, on the ground that his sham wildernesses and waterfalls could never come up to Skiddaw and Lodore. To spend a week at Keswick is for him to be "in Elysium." He kept notes, too, about

natural history, which seem to show as keen an interest in the behaviour of birds or insects as that of White of Selborne himself. And yet his sensibility to such impressions has scarcely left a trace in his poetry, except in the moping owl and the droning flight of the beetle in the "Elegy." The Spring has to appear in company with the "rosy-bosom'd hours," and the Muse and the insects have to preach a pathetic little sermon to justify the notice which is taken of them. Obviously this is not the kind of mountain worship which would satisfy Scott or Wordsworth. Gray was, perhaps, capable of feeling "the impulse from the vernal wood" as truly as Wordsworth, but he would have altogether rejected the doctrine that it could teach him more than all "the sages," and resisted the temptation to throw his books aside except for a brief constitutional. A turn in the backs of the colleges was enough for him, as a rule, and sometimes he may thoroughly enjoy a brief holiday by the side of Derwentwater as a delightful relief after the muddy oozings of the Cam. Nobody could, in this sense, love nature with a more sincere and vivid affection; but such a love of nature is not symptomatic, as with Wordsworth, or Cowper, or Rousseau, of any preference of savage, or rustic, or simple life to the existing order of civilised society. It implied at most the development of a new taste, inadequately appreciated by the cockney men of letters of his own or the preceding generation, but not that passionate longing for relief from an effete set of conventions, poetical, political, and social, characteristic of the rising school. His head, when he travels, is evidently as full of Dugdale's "Monasticon" as of Ossian, and he reconstructs and repeoples Netley Abbey in fancy to give a charm to the Solent. He places in it a monk, who glances at the white sail that shoots by over a stretch of blue glittering sea visible between the oak groves, and then enters and crosses himself to drive away

the tempter who has thrown that distraction in his way. Gray himself pretty much shared the sentiments of his imagined monk, and only catches occasional glimpses of natural scenery from the loopholes of his retreat in an eighteenth-century cloister.

STERNE

"Love me, love my book," is a version of a familiar proverb which one might be slow to accept. There are, as one need hardly say, many admirable persons for whose sake one would gladly make any sacrifice of personal comfort short of that implied in a study of their works. But the converse of the statement is more nearly true. I confess that I at any rate love a book pretty much in proportion as it makes me love the author. I do not of course speak of histories or metaphysical treatises which one reads for the sake of the information or of the logical teaching; but of the imaginative books which appeal in the last resort to the sympathy between the writer and the reader. It matters not whether you are brought into contact with a man by seeing or hearing, by the printed or spoken word—the ultimate source of pleasure is the personal affinity. To read a book in the true sense—to read it, that is, not as the critic but in the spirit of enjoyment—is to lay aside for the moment one's own personality, and to become a part of the author. It is to enter the world in which he habitually lives—for each of us lives in a separate world of his own—to breathe his air, and therefore to receive pleasure and pain according as the atmosphere is or is not congenial. I may by an intellectual effort perceive the greatness of a writer whose character is essentially antagonistic to my own; but I cannot feel it as it must be felt for genuine enjoyment. The qualification must, of course, be understood that a great book really

expresses the most refined essence of the writer's character. It gives the author transfigured, and does not represent all the stains and distortions which he may have received in his progress through the world. In real life we might have been repelled by Milton's stern Puritanism, or by some outbreak of rather testy self-assertion. In reading "Paradise Lost," we feel only the loftiness of character, and are raised and inspirited by the sentiments, without pausing to consider the particular application.

If this be true in some degree of all imaginative writers, it is especially true of humourists. For humour is essentially the expression of a personal idiosyncrasy, and a man is a humourist just because the tragic and the comic elements of life present themselves to his mind in new and unexpected combinations. The objects of other men's reverence strike him from the ludicrous point of view, and he sees something attractive in the things which they affect to despise. It is his function to strip off the commonplaces by which we have tacitly agreed to cover over our doubts and misgivings, and to explode empty pretences by the touch of a vigorous originality; and therefore it is that the great mass of mankind are apt to look upon humour of the stronger flavour with suspicion. They suspect the humourist—not without reason—of laughing at their beards. There is no saying where he may not explode next. They can enjoy the mere buffoonery which comes from high spirits combined with thoughtlessness. And they can fairly appreciate the gentle humour of Addison, or Goldsmith, or Charles Lamb, where the kindliness of the intention is so obvious that the irony is felt to be harmless. It represents only the tinge of melancholy which every good man must feel at the sight of human folly, and is used rather to light up by its gentle irradiation the amiable aspects of weakness than to unmask solemn affectation and successful hypocrisy. As soon as the

humourist begins to be more pungent, and the laughter to be edged with scorn and indignation, good quiet people who do not like to be shocked begin to draw back. They are half ashamed when a Cervantes or a Montaigne, a Rabelais or a Swift, takes them into his confidence and proposes in the true humourist's spirit to but show them the ugly realities of the world or of his own mind. They shrink from the exposure which follows of the absurdity of heroes, the follies of the wise, the cruelty and injustice of the virtuous. In their hearts they take this daring frankness for sheer cynicism, and reject his proffered intimacy. They would rather overlook the hollowness of established convention than have them ruthlessly exposed by the sudden audacity of these daring rebels. To the man, on the contrary, who is predisposed to sympathy by some affinity of character, the sudden flash of genuine feeling is infinitely refreshing. He rejoices to see theories confronted with facts, solemn conventions turned inside out, and to have the air cleared by a sudden burst of laughter, though it may occasionally have something rather savage in it. He welcomes the discovery that another man has dared to laugh at the idols before which we are all supposed to bow in solemn reverence. We love the humour in short so far as we love the character from which it flows. Everybody can love the spirit which shows itself in the "Essays of Elia;" but you can hardly love the "Tale of a Tub" or "Gulliver" unless you have a sympathy with the genuine Swift which overpowers your occasional disgust at his misanthropy. But to this general rule there is one marked exception in our literature. It is impossible for any one with the remotest taste for literary excellence to read "Tristram Shandy" or the "Sentimental Journey" without a sense of wondering admiration. One can hardly read the familiar passages without admitting that Sterne was perhaps the greatest artist in the language. No one at least shows more

inimitable felicity in producing a pungent effect by a few touches of exquisite precision. He gives the impression that the thing has been done once for all; he has hit the bull's eye round which inspiring marksmen go on blundering indefinitely without any satisfying success. Two or three of the scenes in which Uncle Toby expresses his sentiments are as perfect in their way as the half-dozen lines in which Mrs. Quickly describes the end of Falstaff, and convince us that three strokes from a man of genius may be worth more than the life's labour of the cleverest of skilled literary workmen. And it may further be said that Uncle Toby, like his kinsmen in the world of humour, is an incarnation of most lovable qualities. In going over the list—a short list in any case—of the immortal characters in fiction, there is hardly any one in our literature who would be entitled to take precedence of him. To find a distinctly superior type, we must go back to Cervantes, whom Sterne idolised and professed to take for his model. But to speak of a character as in some sort comparable to Don Quixote, though without any thought of placing him on the same level, is to admit that he is a triumph of art. Indeed, if we take the other creator of types, of whom it is only permitted to speak with bated breath, we must agree that it would be difficult to find a figure even in the Shakespearean gallery more admirable in its way. Of course, the creation of a Hamlet, an Iago, or a Falstaff implies an intellectual intensity and reach of imaginative sympathy altogether different from anything which his warmest admirers would attribute to Sterne. I only say that there is no single character in Shakespeare whom we see more vividly and love more heartily than Mr. Shandy's uncle.

It should follow, according to the doctrine just set forth, that we ought to love Uncle Toby's creator. But here I fancy that everybody will be sensible of a considerable difficulty. The judgment pronounced upon Sterne by

Thackeray seems to me to be substantially unimpeachable. The more I know of the man, for my part, the less I like him. It is impossible to write his biography (from the admiring point of view) without making it a continuous apology. His faults may be extenuated by the customary devices; but there is a terrible lack of any positive merits to set against them. He seems to have been fond of his daughter and tolerant of his wife. The nearest approach to a good action recorded of him is that when they preferred remaining in France to following him to England, he took care that they should have the income which he had promised. The liberality was nothing very wonderful. He knew that his wife was severely economical, as she had good reason to be; inasmuch as his own health was most precarious, and he was spending his income with a generous freedom which left her in destitution at his death. Still we are glad to give him all credit for not being a grudging paymaster. Some better men have been less good-natured. The rest of his panegyric consists of excuses for his short-comings. We know the regular formulæ. He had bad companions, it is said, in his youth. Men who show a want of principle in later life have a knack of picking up bad companions at their outset. We are reminded as usual that the morals of the time were corrupt. It is a very difficult question how far this is true. We can only make a rough guess as to the morals of our own time; some people can see steady improvement, where others see nothing but signs of growing corruption; but when we come to speak of the morals of an age more or less removed, there are so many causes of illusion that our estimates have very small title to respect. It is no doubt true that the clergy of the Church of England in Sterne's day took a less exalted view than they now do of their own position and duties; that they were frequently pluralists and absentees; that patrons had small sense of responsibility; and that, as a general

rule, the spiritual teachers of the country took life easily, and left an ample field for the activity of Wesley and his followers. But, making every allowance for this, it would be grossly unfair to deny, what is plainly visible in all the memoirs of the time, that there were plenty of honest squires and persons in every part of the country leading wholesome domestic lives.

But, in any case, such apologies rather explain how a man came to be bad, than prove that he was not bad. They would show at most that we were making an erroneous inference if we inferred badness of heart from conduct which was not condemned by the standard of his own day. This argument, however, is really inapplicable. Sterne's faults were of a kind for which if anything there was less excuse then than now. The faults of his best-known contemporaries, of men like Fielding, Smollett, or Churchill, were the faults of robust temperament with an excess of animal passions. Their coarseness has left a stain upon their pages as it injured their lives. But, however much we may lament or condemn, we do not feel that such men were corrupt at heart. And that, unfortunately, is just what we are tempted to feel about Sterne. When the huge, brawny parson, Churchill, felt his unfitness for clerical life, he pitched his cassock to the dogs and blossomed out in purple and gold. He set the respectabilities at defiance, took up with Wilkes and the reprobates, and roared out full-mouthed abuse against bishops and ministers. He could still be faithful to his friends, observe his own code of honour, and do his best to make some atonement to the victims of his misconduct. Sterne, one feels, differs from Churchill not really as being more virtuous, but in not having the courage to be so openly vicious. Unlike Churchill, he could be a consummate sneak. He was quite as ready to flatter Wilkes or to be on intimate terms with atheists and libertines, with Holbach and Crébillon, when his bishop

and his parishioners could not see him. His most intimate friend from early days was John Hall Stevenson—the country squire whose pride it was to ape in the provinces the orgies of the monks of Medmenham Abbey, and once notorious as the author of a grossly indecent book. The dog-Latin letter in which Sterne informs this chosen companion that he is weary of his life contains other remarks sufficiently significant of the nature of their intimacy. The age was not very nice; but it was quite acute enough to see the objections to a close alliance between a married ecclesiastic of forty-five[1] and the rustic Don Juan of the district. But his cynicism becomes doubly disgusting when we remember that Sterne was all the time as eager as any patronage hunter to ingratiate himself into the good graces of bishops. Churchill, we remember, lampooned Warburton with savage ferocity. Sterne tried his best to conciliate the most conspicuous prelate of the day. He never put together a more elaborately skilful bit of writing than the letter which he wrote to Garrick, with the obvious intention that it should be shown to Warburton. He humbly says that he has no claim to an introduction, except "what arises from the honour and respect which, in the progress of my work, will be shown the world I owe so great a man." The statement was probably meant to encounter a suspicion which Warburton entertained that he was to be introduced in a ridiculous character in "Tristram Shandy." The bishop was sufficiently soothed to administer not only good advice but a certain purse of gold, which had an unpleasant resemblance to hush-money. It became evident, however, that the author of "Tristram Shandy" was not a possible object of episcopal patronage; and, indeed, he was presently described by the bishop as an "irrevocable scoundrel." Sterne's "honour and respect" never found expression

[1] Sterne says in the letter that Hall was over forty; and he was five year older than Hall.

in his writings; but he ingeniously managed to couple the "Divine Legation"—the work which had justified Warburton's elevation to the bench—with the "Tale of a Tub," the audacious satire upon orthodox opinions which had been an insuperable bar to Swift's preferment. The insinuation had its sting, for there were plenty of critics in those days who maintained that Warburton's apology was really more damaging to the cause of orthodoxy than Swift's burlesque. We cannot resist the conviction that if Warburton had been more judicious in his distribution of patronage, he would have received a very different notice in return. The blow from Churchill's bludgeon was, on any right, given by an open enemy. This little stab came from one who had been a servile flatterer.

No doubt Sterne is to be pitied for his uncongenial position. The relations who kindly took him off the hands of his impecunious father could provide for him most easily in the Church; and he is not the only man who has been injured by being forced by such considerations into a career for which he was unfitted. In the same way we may pity him for having become tired of his wife whom he seems to have married under a generous impulse—she was no doubt a very tiresome woman—and try to forgive him for some of his flirtations. But it is not so easy to forgive the spirit in which he conducted them. One story, as related by an admiring biographer, will be an amply sufficient specimen. He fell in love with a Miss Fourmantelle, who was living at York when he was finishing the first volumes of "Tristram Shandy" at the ripe age of forty-six. He introduced her into that work as "dear, dear Jenny." He writes to her in his usual style of lovemaking. He swears that he loves her "to distraction," and will love her "to eternity." He declares that there is "only one obstacle to their happiness"—obviously Mrs. Sterne—and solemnly prays to God that she may so live and love him as one day to

share in his great good fortune. Precisely similar aspirations, we note in passing, were to be soon afterwards addressed to Mrs. Draper, on the hypothesis that two obstacles to their happiness might be removed, namely, Mr. Draper and Mrs. Sterne. Few readers are likely to be edified by the sacred language used by a clergyman on such an occasion; though biographical zeal has been equal even to this emergency. But the sequel to the Fourmantelle story is the really significant part. Mr. Sterne goes to London to reap the social fruits of his amazing success with "Tristram Shandy." The whole London world falls at his feet; he is overwhelmed with invitations, and deafened with flattery; and poor literary drudges like Goldsmith are scandalised by so overpowering a triumph. Nobody had thought it worth while to make a fuss about the author of the "Vicar of Wakefield." Sterne writes the accounts of his unprecedented success to Miss Fourmantelle: he snatches moments in the midst of his crowded levees to tell her that he is hers for ever and ever, that he would "give a guinea for a squeeze of her hand;" and promises to use his influence in some affair in which she is interested. Hereupon Miss Fourmantelle follows him to London. She finds him so deeply engaged that he cannot see her from Sunday till Friday; though he is still good enough to say that he would wish to be with her always, were it not for "fate." And, hereupon, Miss Fourmantelle vanishes out of history, and Mr. Sterne ceases to trouble his head about her. It needs only to be added that this is but one episode in Sterne's career out of several of which the records have been accidentally preserved. Mrs. Draper seems to have been the most famous case; but, according to his own statement, he had regularly on hand some affair of the sort, and is proud of the sensibility which they indicate.

Upon such an occurrence only one comment is possible from the moralist's point of view, namely, that a

brother of Miss Fourmantelle, had she possessed a brother, would have been justified in administering a horse-whipping. I do not, however, wish to preach a sermon upon Sterne's iniquities, or to draw any edifying conclusions upon the present occasion. We have only to deal with the failings of the man so far as they are reflected in the author. Time enables us to abstract and distinguish. A man's hateful qualities may not be of the essence of his character, or they may be only hateful in certain specific relations which do not now affect us. Moreover, there is some kind of immorality—spite and uncharitableness, for example—which is not without its charm. Pope was in many ways a far worse man than Sterne; he was an incomparably more elaborate liar, and the amount of gall with which his constitution was saturated would have been enough to furnish a whole generation of Sternes. But we can admire the brilliance of Pope's epigrams without bothering ourselves with the reflection that he told a whole series of falsehoods as to the date of their composition. We can enjoy the pungency of his indignant satire without asking whether it was directed against deserving objects. Atticus was perhaps a very cruel caricature of Addison; but the lines upon Atticus remain as an incomparably keen dissection of a type which need not have been embodied in this particular representative. Some people, indeed, may be too virtuous or tender-hearted to enjoy any exposure of human weakness. I make no pretensions to such amiability, and I can admire the keenness of the wasp's sting when it is no longer capable of touching me and my friends. Indeed, almost any genuine ebullition of human passion is interesting in its way, and it would be pedantic to be scandalised whenever it is rather more vehement than a moralist would approve, or happens to break out on the wrong occasion. The reader can apply the correction for himself; he can read satire in his moments of virtuous indignation, and

twist it in his own mind against some of those people—they are generally to be found—who really deserve it. But the case is different when the sentiment itself is offensive, and offensive by reason of insincerity. When the very thing by which we are supposed to be attracted is the goodness of a man's heart, a suspicion that he was a mere Tartufe cannot enter our minds without injuring our enjoyment. We may continue to admire the writer's technical skill, but he cannot fascinate us unless he persuades us of his sincerity. One might, to take a parallel case, admire Reynolds for his skill of hand, and fine perception of form and colour, if he had used them only to represent objects as repulsive as the most hideous scenes in Hogarth. One loves him, because of the exquisite tenderness of nature implied in the representations of infantile beauty. And if it were possible to feel that this tenderness was a mere sham, that his work was that of a dexterous artist skilfully flattering the fondness of parents, the charm would vanish. The children would breathe affectation instead of simplicity, and provoke only the sardonic sneer which is suggested by most of the infantile portraits collected in modern exhibitions.

It is with something of this feeling that we read Sterne. Of the literary skill there cannot be a moment's question; but if we for a moment yield to the enchantment, we feel ashamed, at the next moment, of our weakness. We have been moved on false pretences; and we seem to see the sham Yorick with that unpleasant leer upon his too expressive face, chuckling quietly at his successful imposition. It is no wonder if many of his readers have revolted, and even been provoked to an excessive reaction of feeling. The criticism was too obvious to be missed. Horace Walpole indulged in a characteristic sneer at the genius who neglected a mother and snivelled over a dead donkey. (The neglect of a mother, we may note in passing, is

certainly not proven.) Walpole was too much of a cynic, it may be said, to distinguish between sentimentalism and genuine sentiment, or rather so much of a cynic that one is surprised at his not liking the sentimentalism more. But Goldsmith at least was a man of real feeling, and as an artist in some respects superior even to Sterne. He was moved to his bitterest outburst of satire by "Tristram Shandy." He despised the charlatan who eked out his defects of humour by the paltry mechanical devices of blank pages, disordered chapters, and a profuse indulgence in dashes. He pointed out with undeniable truth the many grievous stains by which Sterne's pages are defaced. He spoke with disgust of the ladies who worshipped the author of a book which they should have been ashamed to read, and found the whole secret of Sterne's success in his pertness and indecency. Goldsmith may have been yielding unconsciously to a not unnatural jealousy, and his criticism certainly omits to take into account Sterne's legitimate claims to admiration. It is happily needless to insist at the present day upon the palpable errors by which the delicate and pure-minded Goldsmith was offended. It is enough to indulge in a passing word of regret that a man of Sterne's genius should have descended so often to mere buffoonery or to the most degrading methods of meeting his reader's interest. "The Sentimental Journey" is a book of simply marvellous cleverness, to which one can find no nearer parallel than Heine's "Reisebilder." But one often closes it with a mixture of disgust and regret. The disgust needs no explanation; the regret is caused by our feeling that something has been missed which ought to have been in the writer's power. He has so keen an eye for picturesque effects; he is so sensitive to a thousand little incidents which your ordinary traveller passes with eyes riveted to his guide-book, or which "Smelfungus" Smollett disregarded in his surly British

pomposity; he is so quick at appreciating some delicate courtesy in humble life or some pathetic touch of commonplace suffering, that one grows angry when he spoils a graceful scene by some prurient double meaning, and wastes whole pages in telling a story fit only for John Hall Stevenson. One feels that one has been rambling with a discreditable parson, who is so glad to be free from the restraints of his parish or of Mrs. Sterne's company that he is always peeping into forbidden corners, and anxious to prove to you that he is as knowing in the ways of a wicked world as a raffish undergraduate enjoying a stolen visit to London. Goldsmith's idyllic pictures of country life may be a little too rose-coloured, but at least they are harmonious. Sterne's sudden excursions into the nauseous are like the brutal practical jokes of a dirty boy who should put filth into a scent bottle. We feel that if he had entered the rustic paradise, of which Dr. and Mrs. Primrose were the Adam and Eve, half his sympathies would have been with the wicked Squire Thornhill; he would have been quite as able to suit that gentleman's tastes as to wheedle the excellent Vicar; and his homage to Miss Olivia would have partaken of the nature of an insult. A man of Sterne's admirable delicacy of genius, writing always with an eye to the canons of taste approved in Crazy Castle, must necessarily produce painful discords, and throw away admirable workmanship upon contemptible ribaldry. But the very feeling proves that there was really a finer element in him. Had he been thoroughly steeped in the noxious element, there would have been no discord. We might simply have set him down as a very clever reprobate. But, with some exceptions, we can generally recognise something so amiable and attractive as to excite our regret for the waste of genius even in his more questionable passages.

Coleridge points out, with his usual critical acuteness,

that much of "Tristram Shandy" would produce simple disgust were it not for the presence of that wonderful group of characters who are antagonistic to the spurious wit based upon simple shocks to a sense of decency. That group redeems the book, and we may say that it is the book. We must therefore admit that the creator of Uncle Toby and his family must not be unreservedly condemned. To admit that one thoroughly dislikes Sterne is not to assert that he was a thorough hypocrite of the downright Tartufe variety. His good feelings must be something more than a mere sham or empty formula; they are not a flimsy veil thrown over degrading selfishness or sensuality. When he is attacked upon this ground, his apologists may have an easy triumph. The true statement is rather that Sterne was a man who understood to perfection the art of enjoying his own good feelings as a luxury without humbling himself to translate them into practice. This is the definition of sentimentalism when the word is used in a bad sense. Many admirable teachers of mankind have held the doctrine that all artistic indulgence is universally immoral, because it is all more or less obnoxious to this objection. So far as a man saves up his good feelings merely to use them as the raw material of poems, he is wasting a force which ought to be applied to the improvement of the world. What have we to do with singing and painting when there are so many of our fellow-creatures whose sufferings might be relieved and whose characters might be purified if we turned our songs into sermons, and, instead of staining canvas, tried to purify the dwellings of the poor? There is a good deal to be said for the thesis that all fiction is really a kind of lying, and that art in general is a luxurious indulgence, to which we have no right whilst crime and disease are rampant in the outer world.

I think, indeed, that I could detect some flaws in the

logic by which this conclusion is supported, but I confess that it often seems to possess a considerable plausibility. The peculiar sentimentalism of which Sterne was one of the first mouthpieces would supply many effective illustrations of the argument; for it is a continuous manifestation of extraordinary skill in providing "sweet poison for the age's tooth." He was exactly the man for his time, though, indeed, so clever a man would probably have been equally able to flatter the prevailing impulse of any time in which his lot had been cast. M. Taine has lately described with great skill the sort of fashion of philanthropy which became popular amongst the upper classes in France in the pre-revolutionary generation. The fine ladies and gentlemen who were so soon to be crushed as tyrannical oppressors of the people had really a strong impression that benevolence was a branch of social elegance which ought to be assiduously cultivated by persons of taste and refinement. A similar tendency, though less strongly marked, is observable amongst the corresponding class in English society. From causes which may be analysed by historians, the upper social stratum was becoming penetrated with a vague discontent with the existing order and a desire to find new outlets for emotional activity. Between the reign of comfortable common-sense, represented by Pope and his school, and the fierce outbreak of passion which accompanied the crash of the revolution, there was an interregnum marked by a semi-conscious fore-feeling of some approaching catastrophe; a longing for fresh excitement, and tentative excursions into various regions of thought, which have since been explored in a more systematic fashion. Sentimentalism was the word which represented one phase of this inarticulate longing, and which expresses pretty accurately the need of having some keen sensations without very well knowing in what particular channels they were to be directed. The growth of the feminine

influence in literature had no doubt some share in this development. Women were no longer content to be simply the pretty fools of the "Spectator," unworthy to learn the Latin grammar or to be admitted to the circle of wits; though they seldom presumed to be independent authors, they were of sufficient importance to have a literature composed for their benefit.

The phrase "sentimentalism" became common towards the middle of the century, as I have remarked in speaking of Richardson. Some time earlier Sterne was writing a love letter to his future wife, lamenting the "quiet and sentimental repasts" which they had had together, and weeping "like a child" (so he writes) at the sight of his single knife and fork and plate. We have known the same spirit in many incarnations in later days. Sterne, who made the word popular in literature, represents what may be considered as sentimentalism in its purest form; that which corresponds most closely to its definition as sentiment running to waste; for in Sterne there is no thought of any moral, or political, or philosophical application. He is as entirely free as a man can be from any suspicion of "purpose." He tells us as frankly as possible that he is simply putting on the cap and bells for our amusement. He must weep and laugh just as the fancy takes him; his pen, he declares, is the master of him, not he the master of his pen. This, being interpreted, means, of course, something rather different from its obvious sense. Nobody, it is abundantly clear, could be a more careful and deliberate artist, though he aims at giving a whimsical and arbitrary appearance to his most skilfully devised effects. The author Sterne has a thorough command of his pen; he only means that the parson Sterne is not allowed to interfere in the management. He has no doctrine which he is in the least ambitious of expounding. He does not even wish to tell us, like some of his successors, that the world is out of

joint; that happiness is a delusion, and misery the only reality; nor, what often comes to just the same thing, is he anxious to be optimistic, and to declare, in the vein of some later humourists, that the world should be regarded through a rose-coloured mask, and that a little effusion of benevolence will summarily remove all its rough places. Undoubtedly it would be easy to argue—were it worth the trouble—that Sterne's peculiarities of temperament would have rendered certain political and religious teachings more congenial to him than others. But he did not live in stirring times, when every man is forced to translate his temperament by a definite creed. He could be as thoroughgoing and consistent an Epicurean as he pleased. Nothing matters very much (that seems to be his main doctrine), so long as you possess a good temper, a soft heart, and have a flirtation or two with pretty women. Though both men may be called sentimentalists, Sterne must have regarded Rousseau's vehement social enthusiasm as so much insanity. The poor man took life in desperate earnest, and instead of keeping his sensibility to warm his own hearth, wanted to set the world on fire. When rambling through France, Sterne had an eye for every pretty vignette by the roadside, for peasants' dances, for begging monks, or smart Parisian grisettes; he received and repaid the flattery of the drawing-rooms, and was, one may suppose, as absolutely indifferent to omens of coming difficulties as any of the freethinking or free-living abbés who were his most congenial company. Horace Walpole was no philosopher, but he shook his head in amazement over the audacious scepticism of French society. Sterne, so far as one can judge from his letters, saw and heard nothing in this direction; and one would as soon expect to find a reflection upon such matters in the "Sentimental Journey" as to come upon a serious discussion of theological controversy in "Tristram Shandy." Now and then some such question just shows

itself for an instant in the background. A negro wanted him to write against slavery; and the letter came just as Trim was telling a pathetic story to Uncle Toby, and suggesting doubtfully that a black might have a soul. "I am not much versed, Corporal," quoth my Uncle Toby, "in things of that kind; but I suppose God would not have made him without one any more than thee or me." Sterne was quite ready to aid the cause of emancipation by adding as many picturesque touches as he could devise to Uncle Toby, or sentimentalising over jackdaws and prisoners in the "Sentimental Journey;" but more direct agitation would have been as little in his line as travelling through France in the spirit of Arthur Young to collect statistics about rent and wages. Sterne's sermons, to which one might possibly turn with a view to discovering some serious opinions, are not without an interest of their own. They show touches of the Shandy style and efforts to escape from the dead level. But Sterne could not be really at home in the pulpit, and all that can be called original is an occasional infusion of a more pungent criticism of life into the moral commonplaces of which sermons were then chiefly composed. The sermon in "Tristram Shandy" supplies a happy background to Uncle Toby's comments; but even Sterne could not manage to interweave them into the text.

The very essence of the Shandy character implies this absolute disengagement from all actual contact with sublunary affairs. Neither Fielding nor Goldsmith can be accused of preaching in the objectionable sense; they do not attempt to supply us with pamphlets in the shape of novels, but in so far as they draw from real life they inevitably suggest some practical conclusions. Reformers, for example, might point to the prison experiences of Dr. Primrose or of Captain Booth, as well as to the actual facts which they represent; and Smollett's account of the British navy is a more valuable historical document than

any quantity of official reports. But in Uncle Toby's bowling-green we have fairly shut the door upon the real world. We are in a region as far removed from the prosaic fact as in Aladdin's wondrous subterranean garden. We mount the magical hobby-horse, and straightway are in an enchanted land, "as though of hemlock we had drunk," and if the region is not altogether so full of delicious perfume as that haunted by Keats's nightingale, and even admits occasional puffs of rather unsavoury odours, it has a singular and characteristic influence of its own. Uncle Toby, so far as his intellect is concerned, is a full-grown child; he plays with his toys, and rejoices over the manufacture of cannon from a pair of jack-boots, precisely as if he were still in petticoats; he lives in a continuous daydream framed from the materials of adult experience, but as unsubstantial as any childish fancies; and when he speaks of realities it is with the voice of one half-awake, and in whose mind the melting vision still blends with the tangible realities. Mr. Shandy has a more direct and conscious antipathy to reality. The actual world is commonplace; the events there have a trick of happening in obedience to the laws of nature; and people not unfrequently feel what one might have expected beforehand that they would feel. One can express them in cut-and-dried formulæ. Mr. Shandy detests this monotony. He differs from the ordinary pedant in so far as he values theories not in proportion to their dusty antiquity, but in proportion to their unreality, the pure whimsicality and irrationality of the heads which contained them. He is a sort of inverted philosopher, who loves the antithesis of the reasonable as passionately as your commonplace philosopher professes to love the reasonable. He is ready to welcome a *reductio ad absurdum* for a demonstration; yet he values the society of men of the ordinary turn of mind precisely because his love of oddities makes him relish a contradiction. He is

enabled to enjoy the full flavour of his preposterous notions by the reaction of other men's astonished common-sense. The sensation of standing upon his head is intensified by the presence of others in the normal position. He delights in the society of the pragmatic and contradictious Dr. Slop, because Slop is like a fish always ready to rise at the bait of a palpable paradox, and quite unable to see with the prosaic humourist that parodoxes are the salt of philosophy. Poor Mrs. Shandy drives him to distraction by the detestable acquiescence with which she receives his most extravagant theories, and the consequent impossibility of ever (in the vulgar phrase) getting a rise out of her.

A man would be priggish indeed who could not enjoy this queer region where all the sober proprieties of ordinary logic are as much inverted as in Alice's Wonderland; where the only serious occupation of a good man's life is in playing an infantile game; where the passion of love is only introduced as a passing distraction when the hobby-horse has accidentally fallen out of gear; where the death of a son merely supplies an affectionate father with a favourable opportunity for airing his queer scraps of outworn moralities, and the misnaming of an infant casts him into a fit of profound melancholy; where everything, in short, is topsy-turvy, and we are invited to sit down, consuming a perpetual pipe in an old-fashioned arbour, dreamily amusing ourselves with the grotesque shapes that seem to be projected, in obedience to no perceptible law, upon the shifting wreaths of smoke. It would be as absurd to lecture the excellent brothers upon the absurdity of their mode of life as to preach morality to the manager of a Punch show, or to demand sentiment in the writer of a mathematical treatise. "I believe in my soul," says Sterne, rather audaciously, "that the hand of the supreme Maker and Designer of all things never made or put a family together, where the

characters of it were cast and contrasted with so dramatic a felicity as ours was, for this end; or in which the capacities of affording such exquisite scenes, and the powers of shifting them perpetually from morning to night, were lodged and entrusted with so unlimited a confidence as in the Shandy family." The grammar of the sentence is rather queer, but we can hardly find fault with the substance. The remark is made *à propos* of Mr. Shandy's attempt to indoctrinate his brother with the true theory of noses, which is prefaced by the profoundly humorous sentence which expresses the leading article of Mr. Shandy's creed: "Learned men, brother Toby, don't write dialogues upon long noses for nothing." And, in fact, one sees how admirably the simplicity of each brother plays into the eccentricity of the other. The elder Shandy could not have found in the universe a listener more admirably calculated to act as whetstone for his strangely constructed wit, to dissent in precisely the right tone, not with a brutal intrusion of common-sense, but with the gentle horror of innocent astonishment at the paradoxes, mixed with veneration for the portentous learning of his senior. By looking at each brother alternately through the eyes of his relative, we are insensibly infected with the intense relish which each feels for the cognate excellence of the other. When the characters are once familiar to us, each new episode in the book is a delightful experiment upon the fresh contrasts which can be struck out by skilfully shifting their positions and exchanging the parts of clown and chief actor. The light is made to flash from a new point, as the gem is turned round by skilled hands. Sterne's wonderful dexterity appears in the admirable setting which is thus obtained for his most telling remarks. Many of the most famous sayings, such as Uncle Toby's remark about the fly, or the recording angel, are more or less adapted from other authors, but they come out so

brilliantly that we feel that he has shown a full right to property which he can turn to such excellent account. Sayings quite as witty, or still wittier, may be found elsewhere. Some of Voltaire's incomparable epigrams, for example, are keener than Sterne's, but they owe nothing to the Zadig or Candide who supplies the occasion for the remark. They are thrown out in passing, and shine by their intrinsic brilliancy. But when Sterne has a telling remark, he carefully prepares the dramatic situation in which it will have the whole force due to the concentrated effect of all the attendant circumstances. "Our armies swore terribly in Flanders," cried my Uncle Toby, "but nothing to this." Voltaire could not have made a happier hit at the excess of the *odium theologicum*, but the saying comes to us armed with the authority of the whole Shandy conclave. We have a vision of the whole party sitting round, each charged with his own peculiar humour. There is Mr. Shandy, whose fancy has been amazingly tickled by the portentous oath of Ernulfus, as regards antiquarian curiosity, and has at once framed a quaint theory of the advantages of profane swearing in order to justify his delight in the tremendous formula. He regards his last odd discovery with the satisfaction of a connoisseur; "I defy a man to swear out of it!" It includes all oaths from that of William the Conqueror to that of the humblest scavenger, and is a perfect institute of swearing collected from all the most learned authorities. And there is the unlucky Dr. Slop, cleverly enticed into the pitfall by Mr. Shandy's simple cunning, and induced to exhibit himself as a monster of ecclesiastical ferocity by thundering forth the sounding anathema at the ludicrously disproportioned case of Obadiah's clumsy knot-tying; and to bring out the full flavour of the grotesque scene, we see it as represented to the childlike intelligence of Uncle Toby, taking it all in sublime seriousness, whistling lilliburlero to soothe his nerves under this amazing

performance, in sheer wonder at the sudden revelation of the potentialities of human malediction, and compressing his whole character in that admirable cry of wonder, so phrased as to exhibit his innocent conviction that the habits of the armies in Flanders supplied a sort of standard by which the results of all human experience might be appropriately measured, and to even justify it in some degree by the queer felicity of the particular application. A formal lecturer upon the evils of intolerance might argue in a set of treatises upon the light in which such an employment of sacred language would strike the unsophisticated common sense of a benevolent mind. The imaginative humourist sets before us a delicious picture of two or three concrete human beings, and is then able at one stroke to deliver a blow more telling than the keenest flashes of the dry light of the logical understanding. The more one looks into the scene and tries to analyse the numerous elements of dramatic effect to which his total impression is owing, the more one admires the astonishing skill which has put so much significance into a few simple words. The colouring is so brilliant and the touch so firm that one is afraid to put any other work beside it. Nobody before or since has had so clear an insight into the meaning which can be got out of a simple scene by a judicious selection and skilful arrangement of the appropriate surroundings. Sterne's comment upon the mode in which Trim dropped his hat at the peroration of his speech upon Master Bobby's death, affecting even the "fat, foolish scullion," is significant. "Had he flung it, or thrown it, or skimmed it, or squirted it, or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under Heaven—or in the best direction that could have been given to it—had he dropped it like a goose, like a puppy, like an ass, or in doing it, or even after he had done it, had he looked like a fool, like a ninny, like a nincompoop, it had failed, and the effect

upon the heart had been lost." Those who would play upon human passions and those who are played upon, or, in Sterne's phrase, those who drive, and those who are driven, like turkeys to market, with a stick and a red clout, are invited to meditate upon Trim's hat; and so may all who may wish to undertand the secret of Sterne's art.

It is true, unfortunately, that this singular skill—the felicity with which Trim's cap, or his Montero cap, or Uncle Toby's pipe—is made to radiate eloquence, sometimes leads to a decided bathos. The climax so elaborately prepared too often turns out to be a faded bit of sentimentalism. We rather resent the art which is thrown away to prepare us for the assertion that "When a few weeks will rescue misery out of her distress, I hate the man who can be a churl of them." So we hate the man who can lift his hand upon a woman save in the way of kindness, but we do not want a great writer to adorn that unimpeachable sentiment with all the jewels of rhetoric. It is just in these very critical passages that Sterne's taste is defective, because his feeling is not sound. We are never sure that we can distinguish between the true gems and the counterfeit. When the moment comes at which he suddenly drops the tear of sensibility, he is almost as likely to provoke sneers as sympathy. There is, for example, the famous donkey, and it is curious to compare the donkey fed with macaroons in the "Tristram Shandy" with the dead donkey of the "Sentimental Journey," whose weeping master lays a crust of bread on the now vacant bit of his bridle. It is obviously the same donkey, and Sterne has reflected that he can squeeze a little more pathos out of the animal by actually killing him, and providing a sentimental master. It seems to me that, in trying to heighten the effect, he has just crossed the dangerous limit which divides sympathetic from derisive laughter;

and whereas the macaroon-fed animal is a possible, straightforward beast, he becomes (as higher beings have done) a humbug in his palpably hypocritical epitaph. Sterne tries his hand in the same way at improving Maria, who is certainly an effective embodiment of the mad young woman who has tried to move us in many forms since the days of Ophelia. In her second appearance, she comes in to utter the famous sentiment about the wind and the shorn lamb. It has become proverbial, and been even credited in the popular mind with a scriptural origin; and considering such a success, one has hardly the right to say that it has gathered a certain sort of banality. Yet it is surely on the extreme verge at which the pathetic melts into the ludicrous. The reflection, however, occurs more irresistibly in regard to that other famous passage about the recording angel. Sterne's admirers held it to be sublime at the time, and he obviously shared the opinion. And it is undeniable that the story of Le Fevre, in which it is the most conspicuous gem, is a masterpiece in its way. No one can read it, or better still, hear it from the lips of a skilful reader, without admitting the marvellous felicity with which the whole scene is presented. Uncle Toby's oath is a triumph fully worthy of Shakespeare. But the recording angel, though he certainly comes in effectively, is a little suspicious to me. It would have been a sacrifice to which few writers could have been equal, to suppress or soften that brilliant climax; and, yet, if the angel had been omitted, the passage would, I fancy, have been really stronger. We might have been left to make the implied comment for ourselves. For the angel seems to introduce an unpleasant air as of eighteenth-century politeness; we fancy that he would have welcomed a Lord Chesterfield to the celestial mansions with a faultless bow and a dexterous compliment; and somehow he appears, to my imagination at least, apparelled in

theatrical gauze and spangles rather than in the genuine angelic costume. Some change passes over every famous passage; the bloom of its first freshness is rubbed off as it is handed from one quoter to another; but where the sentiment has no false ring at the beginning, the colours may grow faint without losing their harmony. In this angel, and some other of Sterne's best-known touches, we seem to feel that the baser metal is beginning to show itself through the superficial enamel.

And this suggests the criticism which must still be made in regard even to the admirable Uncle Toby. Sterne has been called the English Rabelais, and was apparently more ambitious himself of being considered as an English Cervantes. To a modern English reader he is certainly far more amusing than Rabelais, and he can be appreciated with less effort than Cervantes. But it is impossible to mention these great names without seeing the direction in which Sterne falls short of the highest excellence. We know that, on clearing away the vast masses of buffoonery and ribaldry under which Rabelais was forced, or chose, to hide himself, we come to the profound thinker and powerful satirist. Sterne represents a comparatively shallow vein of thought. He is the mouthpiece of a sentiment which had certainly its importance in so far as it was significant of a vague discontent with things in general, and a desire for more exciting intellectual food. He was so far ready to fool the age to the top of its bent; and in the course of his ramblings he strikes some hard blows at various types of hide-bound pedantry. But he is too systematic a trifler to be reckoned with any plausibility amongst the spiritual leaders of any intellectual movement. In that sense, "Tristram Shandy" is a curious symptom of the existing currents of emotion, but cannot, like the "Emile" or the "Nouvelle Héloïse," be reckoned as one of the efficient causes. This complete and characteristic want of purpose

may indeed be reckoned as a literary merit, so far as it prevented "Tristram Shandy" from degenerating into a mere tract. But the want of intellectual seriousness has another aspect, which comes out when we compare Tristram Shandy, for example, with Don Quixote. The resemblance, which has been often pointed out (as indeed Sterne is fond of hinting at it himself) consists in this, that in both cases we see lovable characters through a veil of the ludicrous. As Don Quixote is a true hero, though he is under a constant hallucination, so Uncle Toby is full of the milk of human kindness, though his simplicity makes him ridiculous to the piercing eyes of common-sense. In both cases, it is inferred, the humourist is discharging his true function of showing the lovable qualities which may be associated with a ludicrous outside.

The Don and the Captain both have their hobbies, which they ride with equal zeal, and there is a close analogy between them. Uncle Toby makes his own apology in the famous oration upon war. "What is war," he asks, "but the getting together of quiet and harmless people with swords in their hands, to keep the turbulent and ambitious within bounds? And heaven is my witness, brother Shandy, that the pleasure I have taken in these things, and that infinite delight in particular which has attended my sieges in the bowling-green, has arisen within me, and I hope in the Corporal too, from the consciousness that in carrying them on we were answering the great ends of our creation." Uncle Toby's military ardour undoubtedly makes a most piquant addition to his simple-minded benevolence. The fusion of the gentle Christian with the chivalrous devotee of honour is perfect; and the kindliest of human beings, who would not hurt a hair of the fly's head, most delicately blended with the gallant soldier who, as Trim avers, would march up to the mouth of a cannon though he saw the match at the

very touchhole. Should anyone doubt the merits of the performance, he might reassure himself by comparing the scene in which Uncle Toby makes the speech, just quoted, with a parallel passage in "The Caxtons," and realise the difference between extreme imitative dexterity and the force of real genius.

It is only when we compare this exquisite picture with the highest art that we are sensible of its comparative deficiency. The imaginative force of Cervantes is proved by the fact that Don Quixote and his followers have become the accepted symbols of the most profoundly tragic element in human life—of the contrast between the lofty idealism of the mere enthusiast and the sturdy common-sense of ordinary human beings—between the utilitarian and the romantic types of character; and as neither aspect of the truth can be said to be exhaustive, we are rightly left with our sympathies equally balanced. The book may be a sad one to those who prefer to be blind; but in proportion as we can appreciate a penetrative insight into the genuine facts of life, we are impressed by this most powerful presentation of the never-ending problem. It is impossible to find in "Tristram Shandy" any central conception of this breadth and depth. If Trim had been as shrewd as Sancho, Uncle Toby would appear like a mere simpleton. Like a child, he requires a thoroughly sympathetic audience who will not bring his playthings to the brutal test of actual facts. The high and earnest enthusiasm of the Don can stand the contrast of common-sense, though at the price of passing into insanity. But Trim is forced to be Uncle Toby's accomplice, or his Commander would never be able to play at soldiers. If Don Quixote had simply amused himself at a mock tournament, and had never been in danger of mistaking a puppet-show for a reality, he would certainly have been more credible, but in the same proportion he would have been commonplace. The

whole tragic element which makes the humour impressive would have disappeared. Sterne seldom ventures to the limit of the tragic. The bowling-green of Mr. Shandy's parlance is too exclusively a sleepy hollow. The air is never cleared by a strain of lofty sentiment. When Yorick and Eugenius form part of the company, we feel that they are rather too much at home with offensive suggestions. When Uncle Toby's innocence fails to perceive their coarse insinuations, we are credited with clearer perception, and expected to sympathise with the spurious wit which derives its chief zest from the presence of the pure-minded victim. And so Uncle Toby comes to represent that stingless virtue, which never gets beyond the ken or hurts the feelings of the easy-going epicurean. His perceptions are too slow and his temper too mild to resent an indecency as his relative, Colonel Newcome, would have done. He would have been too complacent, even to the outrageous Costigan. He is admirably kind when a comrade falls ill at his door; but his benevolence can exhale itself sufficiently in the intervals of hobby-riding, and his chivalrous temper in fighting over old battles with the Corporal. We feel that he must be growing fat; that his pulse is flabby and his vegetative functions predominant. When he falls in love with the repulsive (for she is repulsive) widow Wadman, we pity him as we pity a poor soft zoophyte in the clutches of a rapacious crab; but we have no sense of a wasted life. Even his military ardour seems to present itself to our minds as due to the simple affection which makes his regiment part of his family rather than to any capacity for heroic sentiment. His brain might turn soft; it would never spontaneously generate the noble madness of a Quixote, though he might have followed that hero with a more canine fidelity than Sancho.

Mr. Matthew Arnold says of Heine, as we all remember, that:—

> The spirit of the world,
> Beholding the absurdity of men—
> Their vanities, their feats—let a sardonic smile
> For one short moment wander o'er his lips—
> That smile was Heine.

There is a considerable analogy, as one may note in passing, between the two men; and if Sterne was not a poet, his prose could perhaps be even more vivid and picturesque than Heine's. But his humour is generally wanting in the quality suggested by Mr. Arnold's phrase. We cannot represent it by a sardonic smile, or indeed by any other expression which we can very well associate with the world-spirit. The imaginative humourist must in all cases be keenly alive to the "absurdity of man;" he must have a sense of the irony of fate, of the strange interlacing of good and evil in the world, and of the baser and nobler elements in human nature. He will be affected differently according to his temperament and his intellectual grasp. He may be most impressed by the affinity between madness and heroism; by the waste of noble qualities on trifling purposes; and, if he be more amiable, by the goodness which may lurk under ugly forms. He may be bitter and melancholy, or simply serious in contemplating the fantastic tricks played by mortals before high heaven. But, in any case, some real undercurrent of deeper feeling is essential to the humourist who impresses us powerfully, and who is equally far from mere buffoonery and sentimental foppery. His smile must be at least edged with melancholy, and his pathos too deep for mere "snivelling."

Sterne is often close to this loftier region of the humorous; sometimes he fairly crosses it; but his step is uncertain as of one not feeling at home. The absurdity of man does not make him "sardonic." He takes things too easily. He shows us the farce of life, and feels that there is a tragical background to it all; but somehow he

is not usually much disposed to cry over it, and he is obviously proud of the tears which he manages to produce. The thought of human folly and suffering does not usually torment and perplex him. The highest humourist should be the laughing and weeping philosopher in one; and in Sterne the weeping philosopher is always a bit of a humbug. The pedantry of the elder Shandy is a simple whim, not a misguided aspiration; and Sterne is so amused with his oddities that he even allows him to be obtrusively heartless. Uncle Toby undoubtedly comes much nearer to complete success; but he wants just that touch of genuine pathos which he would have received from the hands of the greatest writers. But the performance is so admirable in the best passages, where Sterne can drop his buffoonery and his indecency, that even a criticism which sets him below the highest place seems almost unfair.

And this may bring us back for a moment to the man himself. Sterne avowedly drew his own portrait in Yorick. That clerical jester, he says, was a mere child, full of whim and gaiety, but without an ounce of ballast. He had no more knowledge of the world at 26 than a "romping unsuspicious girl of 13." His high spirits and frankness were always getting him into trouble. When he heard of a spiteful or ungenerous action he would blurt out that the man was a dirty fellow. He would not stoop to set himself right, but let people think of him what they would. Thus his faults were all due to his extreme candour and impulsiveness. It wants little experience of the world to recognise the familiar portrait of an impulsive and generous fellow. It represents the judicious device by which a man reconciles himself to some very ugly actions. It provides by anticipation a complete excuse for thoughtlessness and meanness. If he is accused of being inconstant, he points out the extreme goodness of his impulses; and if the impulses

were bad, he argues that at least they did not last very long. He prides himself on his disregard to consequences, even when the consequences may be injurious to his friends. His feelings are so genuine for the moment that his conscience is satisfied without his will translating them into action. He is perfectly candid in expressing the passing phrase of sentiment, and therefore does not trouble himself to ask whether what is true to-day will be true to-morrow. He can call an adversary a dirty fellow, and is very proud of his generous indiscretion. But he is also capable of gratifying the dirty fellow's vanity by high-flown compliments if he happens to be in the enthusiastic vein; and somehow the providence which watches over the thoughtless is very apt to make his impulses fall in with the dictates of calculated selfishness. He cannot be an accomplished courtier, because he is apt to be found out; but he can crawl and creep for the nonce with anyone. In real life such a man is often as delightful for a short time as he becomes contemptible on a longer acquaintance. When we think of Sterne as a man, and try to frame a coherent picture of his character, we must give a due weight to the baser elements of his composition. We cannot forget his shallowness of feeling and the utter want of self-respect which prompted him to condescend to be a mere mountebank, and to dabble in filth for the amusement of graceless patrons. Nor is it really possible entirely to throw aside this judgment even in reading his works; for even after abstracting our attention from the rubbish and the indecency, we are haunted in the really admirable parts by our misgivings as to their sincerity. But the problem is often one to tax critical acumen. It is one aspect of a difficulty which meets us sometimes in real life. Every man flatters himself that he can detect the mere hypocrite. We seem to have a sufficient instinct to warn us against the downright pitfalls where an absolute void is covered by an artificial

stratum of mere verbiage. Perhaps even this is not so easy as we sometimes fancy; but there is a more refined sort of hypocrisy which requires keener dissection. How are men to draw the narrow and yet all-important line which separates—not the genuine from the feigned emotion—but the emotion which is due to some real cause, and that which is a cause in itself? Some people we know fall in love with a woman, and others are really in love with the passion. Grief may be the sign of lacerated affection, or it may be a mere luxury indulged in for its own sake. The sentimentalism which Sterne represented corresponded in the main to this last variety. People had discovered the art of extracting direct enjoyment from their own "sensibility," and Sterne expressly gives thanks for his own as the great consolation of his life. He has the heartiest possible relish for his tears and lamentations, and it is precisely his skill in marking this vein of interest which gives him his extraordinary popularity. So soon as we discover that a man is enjoying his sorrow our sympathy is killed within us, and for that reason Sterne is apt to be repulsive to humourists whose sense of the human tragi-comedy is deeper than his own. They agree with him that the vanity of human dreams may suggest a mingling of tears and laughter; but they grieve because they must, not because they find it a pleasant amusement. Yet it is perhaps unwise to poison our pleasure by reflections of this kind. They come with critical reflection, and may at least be temporarily suppressed when we are reading for enjoyment. We need not sin ourselves by looking a gift horse in the mouth. The sentiment is genuine at the time. Do not inquire how far it has been deliberately concocted and stimulated. The man is not only a wonderful artist, but he is right in asserting that his impulses are clear and genuine. Why should not that satisfy us? Are we to set up for so rigid a nature that

we are never to consent to sit down with Uncle Toby and take him as he is made? We may wish, if we please that Sterne had always been in his best, and that his tears flowed from a deeper source. But so long as he really speaks from his heart—and he does so in all the finer parts of the Toby drama—why should we remember that the heart was rather flighty, and regarded with too much conscious complacency by its proprietor? The Shandyism upon which he prided himself was not a very exalted form of mind, nor one which offered a very deep or lasting satisfaction. Happily we can dismiss an author when we please; give him a cold shoulder in our more virtuous moods, and have a quiet chat with him when we are graciously pleased to relax. In those times we may admit Sterne as the best of jesters, though it may remain an open question whether the jester is on the whole an estimable institution.

COUNTRY BOOKS

A LOVE of the country is taken, I know not why, to indicate the presence of all the cardinal virtues. It is one of those outlying qualities which are not exactly meritorious, but which, for that very reason, are the more provocative of a pleasing self-complacency. People pride themselves upon it as upon early rising, or upon answering letters by return of post. We recognise the virtuous hero of a novel as soon as we are told that the cat instinctively creeps to his knee, and that the little child clutches his hand to stay his tottering steps. To say that we love the country is to make an indirect claim to a similar excellence. We assert a taste for sweet and innocent pleasures, and an indifference to the feverish excitements of artificial society. I, too, love the country if such a statement can be received after such an exordium; but I confess—to be duly modest—that I love it best in books. In real life I have remarked that it is frequently damp and rheumatic, and most hated by those who know it best. Not long ago, I heard a worthy orator at a country school-treat declare to his small audience that honesty, sobriety, and industry, in their station in life, might possibly enable them to become cabdrivers in London. The precise form of the reward was suggested, I fancy, by some edifying history of an ideal cabman; but the speaker clearly knew the road to his hearers' hearts. Perhaps the realisation of this high destiny

might dispel their illusions. Like poor Susan at the corner of Wood Street, they would see

> Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
> And a river flow on through the vale of Cheapside.

The Swiss, who at home regards a mountain as an unmitigated nuisance, is (or once was) capable of developing sentimental yearnings for the Alps at the sound of a *ranz des vaches*. We all agree with Horace that Rome is most attractive at Tibur, and *vice versâ*. It is the man who has been "long in populous cities pent" who, according to Milton, enjoys

> The smell of grain or tedded grass or kine,
> Or daisy, each rural sight, each rural sound;

and the phrase is employed to illustrate the sentiments of a being whose enjoyment of paradise was certainly enhanced by a sufficiently contrasted experience.

I do not wish to pursue the good old moral saws expounded by so many preachers and poets. I am only suggesting a possible ground of apology for one who prefers the ideal mode of rustication; who can share the worthy Johnson's love of Charing Cross, and sympathise with his pathetic remark when enticed into the Highlands by his bear-leader that it is easy "to sit at home and conceive rocks, heaths, and waterfalls." Some slight basis of experience must doubtless be provided on which to rear any imaginary fabric; and the mental opiate, which stimulates the sweetest reverie, is found in chewing the cud of past recollections, but with a good guide, one requires small external aid. Though a cockney in grain, I love to lean upon the farmyard gate; to hear Mrs. Poyser give a bit of her mind to the squire; to be lulled into a placid doze by the humming of Dorlecote Mill; to sit down in Dandie Dinmont's parlour, and bestow crumbs from his groaning table upon three generations of Peppers and Mustards;

or to drop into the kitchen of a good old country inn, and to smoke a pipe with Tom Jones or listen to the simple-minded philosophy of Parson Adams. When I lift my eyes to realities, I can dimly descry across the street a vision of my neighbour behind his looking-glass adjusting the parting of his back hair, and achieving triumphs with his white tie calculated to excite the envy of a Brummel. It is pleasant to take down one of the magicians of the shelf, to annihilate my neighbour and his evening parties, and to wander off through quiet country lanes into some sleepy hollow of the past.

Who are the most potent weavers of that delightful magic? Clearly, in the first place, those who have been themselves in contact with rural sights and sounds. The echo of an echo loses all sharpness of definition; our guide may save us the trouble of stumbling through farm-yards and across ploughed fields, but he must have gone through it himself till his very voice has a twang of the true country accent. Milton, as Mr. Pattison has lately told us, "saw nature through books," and is therefore no trustworthy guide. We feel that he has got a Theocritus in his pocket; that he is using the country to refresh his memories of Spenser, or Chaucer, or Virgil; and, instead of forgetting the existence of books in his company, we shall be painfully abashed if we miss some obvious allusion or fail to identify the passages upon which he has moulded his own descriptions. And, indeed, to put it broadly, the poets are hardly to be trusted in this matter, however fresh and spontaneous may be their song. They don't want to offer us a formal sermon, unless "they" means Wordsworth; but they have not the less got their little moral to insinuate. Shelley's skylark and Keats's nightingale are equally determined that we shall indulge in meditations about life and death and the mysterious meaning of the universe. That is just what, on these occasions, we want to forget; we want the bird's song,

not the emotions which it excites in our abnormally sensitive natures. I can never read without fresh admiration Mr. Arnold's "Gipsy Scholar," but in this sense that delightful person is a typical offender. I put myself, at Mr. Arnold's request, in the corner of the high half-reaped field; I see the poppies peeping through the green roots and yellowing stems of the corn; I lazily watch the scholar with "his hat of antique shape," roaming the countryside, and becoming the living centre of one bit of true old-fashioned rustic scenery after another; and I feel myself half persuaded to be a gipsy. But then, before I know how or why, I find that I am to be worrying myself about the strange disease of modern life; about "our brains o'ertaxed and palsied hearts," and so forth; and instead of being lulled into a delicious dream, I have somehow been entrapped into a meditation upon my incapacity for dreaming. And more or less, this is the fashion of all poets. You can never be sure that they will let you have your dream out quietly. They must always be bothering you about the state of their souls; and, to say the truth, when they try to be simply descriptive, they are for the most part intolerably dull.

Your poet, of course, is bound to be an interpreter of nature; and nature, for the present purpose, must be regarded as simply a nuisance. The poet, by his own account, is condescending to find words for the inarticulate voices of sea, and sky, and mountain. In reality nature is nothing but the sounding-board which is to give effect to his own valuable observations. It is a general but safe rule that whenever you come across the phrase "laws of nature," in an article—especially if it is by a profound philosopher—you may expect a sophistry; and it is still more certain that when you come across nature in a poem you should prepare to receive a sermon. It does not in the least follow that it will be a bad one. It may be exquisite, graceful, edifying, and sublime; but, as

a sermon, the more effective the less favourable to the reverie which one desires to cultivate. Nor, be it observed, does it matter whether the prophet be more or less openly and unblushingly didactic. A good many hard things have been said about poor Wordsworth for his delight in sermonising; and though I love Wordsworth with all my heart, I certainly cannot deny that he is capable of becoming a portentous weariness to the flesh. But, for this purpose, Wordsworth is no better and no worse than Byron or Shelley, or Keats or Rousseau, or any of the dealers in praises of "Weltschmerz," or mental dyspepsia. Mr. Ruskin has lately told us that in his opinion ninety-nine things out of a hundred are not what they should be, but the very opposite of what they should be. And therefore he sympathises less with Wordsworth than with Byron and Rousseau, and other distinguished representatives of the same agreeable creed. From the present point of view the question is irrelevant. I wish to be for the nonce a poet of nature, not a philosopher, either with a healthy or a disturbed liver, delivering a judicial opinion about nature as a whole or declaring whether I regard it as representing a satisfactory or a thoroughly uncomfortable system. I condemn neither opinion; I will not pronounce Wordsworth's complacency to be simply the glow thrown from his comfortable domestic hearth upon the outside darkness; or Byron's wrath against mankind to be simply the crying of a spoilt child with a digestion ruined by sweetmeats. I do not want to think about it. Preaching, good or bad, from the angelic or diabolical point of view, cunningly hidden away in delicate artistic forms, or dashed ostentatiously in one's face in a shower of moral platitudes, is equally out of place. And, therefore, for the time, I would choose for my guide to the Alps some gentle enthusiast in "Peak and Passes," who tells me in his admirably matter-of-fact spirit what he had for lunch and how many steps he had

to cut in the *mur de la côte*, and catalogues the mountains which he could see as calmly as if he were repeating a schoolboy lesson in geography. I eschew the meditations of Obermann, and do not care in the least whether he got into a more or less maudlin frame of mind about things in general as contemplated from the Col de Jaman. I shrink even from the admirable descriptions of Alpine scenery in the "Modern Painters," lest I should be launched unawares into ethical or æsthetical speculation. "A plague of both your houses!" I wish to court entire absence of thought—not even to talk to a graceful gipsy scholar, troubled with aspirations for mysterious knowledge; but rather to the genuine article, such as the excellent Bamfylde Moore Carew, who took to be a gipsy in earnest, and was content to be a thorough loafer, not even a Bohemian in conscious revolt against society, but simply outside of the whole social framework, and accepting his position with as little reflection as some wild animal in a congenial country.

Some kind philosopher professes to put my thoughts into correct phraseology by saying that for such a purpose I require thoroughly "objective" treatment. I must, however, reject his suggestions, not only because "objective" and "subjective" are vile phrases, used for the most part to cover indolence and ambiguity of thought, but also because, if I understand the word rightly, it describes what I do not desire. The only thoroughly objective works with which I am acquainted are those of which Bradshaw's Railway Guide is an accepted type. There are occasions, I will admit, in which such literature is the best help to the imagination. When I read in prosaic black and white that by leaving Euston Square at 10 A.M. I shall reach Windermere at 5.45 P.M., it sometimes helps me to perform an imaginary journey to the lakes even better than a study of Wordsworth's poems. It seems to give a fixed point round which old fancies and

memories can crystallise; to supply a useful guarantee that Grasmere and Rydal do in sober earnest belong to the world of realities, and are not mere parts of the decaying phantasmagoria of memory. And I was much pleased the other day to find a complimentary reference in a contemporary essayist to a lively work called, I believe, the "Shepherd's Guide," which once beguiled a leisure hour in a lonely inn, and which simply records the distinctive marks put upon the sheep of the district. The sheep, as it proved, was not a mere poetical figment in an idyll, but a real tangible animal, with wool capable of being tarred and ruddled, and eating real grass in real fells and accessible mountain dales. In our childhood, when any old broomstick will serve as well as the wondrous horse of brass

> On which the Tartar king did ride,

in the days when a cylinder with four pegs is as good a steed as the finest animal in the Elgin marbles, and when a puddle swarming with tadpoles or a streamlet haunted by water-rats is as full of romance as a jungle full of tigers, the barest catalogue of facts is the most effective. A child is deliciously excited by "Robinson Crusoe" because De Foe is content to give the naked scaffolding of direct narrative, and leaves his reader to supply the sentiment and romance at pleasure. Who does not fear, on returning to the books which delighted his childhood, that all the fairy-gold should have turned to dead leaves? I remember a story told in some forgotten book of travels, which haunted my dreams, and still strikes me as terribly impressive. I see a traveller benighted by some accident in a nullah where a tiger has already supped upon his companion, and listening to mysterious sounds, as of fiendish laughter, which he is afterwards cruel enough to explain away by some rationalising theory as to gases. How or why the traveller got into or

emerged from the scrape, I know not; but some vague association of ferocious wild beasts and wood-demons in ghastly and haunted solitudes has ever since been excited in me by the mention of a nullah. It is as redolent of awful mysteries as the chasm in "Kubla Khan." And it is painful to reflect that a nullah may be a commonplace phenomenon in real life; and that the anecdote might possibly affect me no more, could I now read it for the first time, than one of the tremendous adventures recorded by Mr. Kingston or Captain Mayne Reid.

As we become less capable of supplying the magic for ourselves, we require it from our author. He must have the art—the less conscious the better—of placing us at his own point of view. He should, if possible, be something of a "humourist," in the old-fashioned sense of the word; not the man who compounds oddities, but the man who is an oddity; the slave, not the master, of his own eccentricities; one absolutely unconscious that the strange twist in his mental vision is not shared by mankind, and capable, therefore, of presenting the fancies dictated by his idiosyncrasy as if they corresponded to obvious and generally recognised realities; and of propounding some quaint and utterly preposterous theory, as though it were a plain deduction from undeniable truths. The modern humourist is the old humourist *plus* a consciousness of his own eccentricity, and the old humourist is the modern humourist *minus* that consciousness. The order of his ideas should not (as philosophers would have it) be identical with the order of things, but be determined by odd arbitrary freaks of purely personal association.

This is the kind of originality which we specially demand from an efficient guide to the country; for the country means a region where men have not been ground into the monotony by the friction of our social mill. The secret of his charm lies in the clearness with which he brings before us some quaint, old-fashioned type of

existence. He must know and care as little for what passes in the great world of cities and parliaments as the family of Tullivers and Dodsons. His horizon should be limited by the nearest country town, and his politics confined to the disputes between the parson and the Dissenting minister. He should have thoroughly absorbed the characteristic prejudices of the little society in which he lives, till he is unaware that it could ever enter into any one's head to doubt their absolute truth. He should have a share of the peculiarity which is often so pathetic in children—the unhesitating conviction that some little family arrangement is a part of the eternal and immutable system of things—and be as much surprised at discovering an irreverent world outside as the child at the discovery that there are persons who do not consider his papa to be omniscient. That is the temper of mind which should characterise your genuine rustic. As a rule, of course, it condemns him to silence. He has no more reason for supposing that some quaint peculiarity of his little circle will be interesting to the outside world than a frog for imagining that a natural philosopher would be interested by the statement that he was once a tadpole. He takes it for granted that we have all been tadpoles. In the queer, outlying corners of the world where the father goes to bed and is nursed upon the birth of a child (a system which has its attractive side to some persons of that persuasion), the singular custom is so much a matter of course that a village historian would not think of mentioning it. The man is only induced to exhibit his humour to the world when, by some happy piece of fortune, he has started a hobby not sufficiently appreciated by his neighbours. Then it may be that he becomes a prophet, and in his anxiety to recommend his own pet fancy, unconsciously illustrates also the interesting social stratum in which it sprang to life. The hobby, indeed, is too often unattractive. When a self-taught philosopher airs some

pet crotchet, and proves, for example, that the legitimate descendants of the lost tribes are to be found amongst the Ojibbeways, he doubtless throws a singular light upon the intellectual peculiarities of his district. But he illustrates chiefly the melancholy truth that a half-taught philosopher may be as dry and as barren as the one who has been smoke-dried according to all the rules of art in the most learned academy of Europe.

There are a few familiar books in which a happy combination of circumstances has provided us with a true country idyll, fresh and racy from the soil, not consciously constructed by the most skilful artistic hand. Two of them have a kind of acknowledged pre-eminence in their own department. The man is not to be envied who has not in his boyhood fallen in love with Izaak Walton and White of Selborne. The boy, indeed, is happily untroubled as to the true source of the charm. He pores over the "Compleat Angler" with the impression that he will gain some hints for beguiling, if not the wily carp, who is accounted the water-fox, at least the innocent roach, who "is accounted the water-sheep for his simplicity or foolishness." His mouth waters as he reads the directions for converting the pike—that compound of mud and needles—into "a dish of meat too good for any but anglers or very honest men;" a transformation which, if authentic, is little less than miraculous. He does not ask what is the secret of the charm of the book even for those to whom fishing is an abomination—a charm which induced even the arch-cockney Dr. Johnson, in spite of his famous definition of angling, to prompt the republication of this angler's bible. It is only as he grows older, and has plodded through other sporting literature, that he can at all explain why the old gentleman's gossip is so fascinating. Walton, undoubtedly, is everywhere charming for his pure simple English, and the unostentatious vein of natural piety which everywhere lies just

beneath the surface of his writing. Now and then, however, in reading the "Lives," we cannot quite avoid a sense that this excellent tradesman has just a touch of the unctuous about him. He is given—it is a fault from which hagiographers can scarcely be free—to using the rose-colour a little too freely. He holds towards his heroes the relation of a sentimental churchwarden to a revered parish parson. We fancy that the eyes of the preacher would turn instinctively to Walton's seat when he wished to catch an admiring glance from an upturned face, and to assure himself that he was touching the "sacred fount of sympathetic tears." We imagine Walton lingering near the porch to submit a deferential compliment as to the "florid and seraphical" discourse to which he has been listening, and scarcely raising his glance above the clerical shoe-buckles. A portrait taken from this point of view is apt to be rather unsatisfactory. Yet, in describing the "sweet humility" of a George Herbert or of the saintly Mr. Farrer, the tone is at least in keeping, and is consistent even with an occasional gleam of humour, as in the account of poor Hooker, tending sheep and rocking the cradle under stringent feminine supremacy. It is less satisfactory when we ask Walton to throw some light upon the curiously enigmatic character of Donne, with its strange element of morbid gloom, and masculine passion, and subtle and intense intellect. Donne married the woman he loved, in spite of her father and to the injury of his own fortunes. "His marriage," however, observes the biographer, "was the remarkable error of his life; an error which, though he had a wit able and very apt to maintain paradoxes, yet he was very far from justifying it." From our point of view, the only error was in the desire to justify an action of which he should have been proud. We must make allowance for the difference in Walton's views of domestic authority; but we feel that his prejudice

disqualifies him from fairly estimating a character of great intrinsic force. A portrait of Donne cannot be adequately brought within the lines accepted by the writer of orthodox and edifying tracts.

In spite of this little failing, this rather excessive subservience to the respectabilities, the "Lives" form a delightful book; but we get the genuine Walton at full length in his "Angler." It was first published in dark days; when the biographer might be glad that his pious heroes had been taken from the sight of the coming evil; when the scattered survivors of his favourite school of divines and poets were turned out of their well-beloved colleges and parsonages, hiding in dark corners or plotting with the melancholy band of exiles in France and Holland; when Walton, instead of listening to the sound and witty discourses of Donne, would find the pulpit of his parish church profaned by some fanatical Puritan, expounding the Westminster Confession in place of the Thirty-nine Articles. The good Walton found consolation in the almost religious pursuit of his hobby. He fortified himself with the authority of such admirable and orthodox anglers as Sir Henry Wotton and Dr. Nowel, Dean of St. Paul's. Dr. Nowel had, "like an honest angler, made that good, plain, unperplexed Catechism which is printed with our good old service-book;" for an angler, it seems, is most likely to know that the road to heaven is not through "hard questions." The dean died at the age of ninety-five, in perfect possession of his faculties; and "'tis said that angling and temperance were great causes of those blessings." Evidently Walton had somehow taken for granted that there is an inherent harmony between angling and true religion, which of course for him implies the Anglican religion. He does not trust himself in the evil times to grumble openly, or to indulge in more than an occasional oblique reference to the dealers in hard questions and metaphysical dogmatism.

He takes his rod, leaves the populous city behind him, and makes a day's march to the banks of the quiet Lea, where he can meet a likeminded friend or two; sit in the sanded parlour of the country inn, and listen to the milk-maid singing that "smooth song made by Kit Marlow, now at least fifty years ago," before English fields had been drenched with the blood of Roundheads and Cavaliers; or lie under a tree, watching his float till the shower had passed, and then calling to mind what "holy Mr. Herbert says of such days and flowers as these." Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright!—but everybody has learnt to share Walton's admiration, and the quotation would now be superfluous. It is nowhere so effective as with Walton's illustrations. We need not, indeed, remember the background of storm to enjoy the quiet sunshine and showers on the soft English landscape, which Walton painted so lovingly. The fact that he was living in the midst of a turmoil, in which the objects of his special idolatry had been so ruthlessly crushed and scattered, may help to explain the intense relish for the peaceful river-side life. His rod was the magic wand to interpose a soft idyllic mist between his eyes and such scenes as were visible at times from the windows of Whitehall. He loved his paradise the better because it was an escape from a pandemonium. But whatever the cause of his enthusiasm, its sincerity and intensity are the main cause of his attractiveness. Many poets of Walton's time loved the country as well as he, and showed it in some of the delicate lyrics which find an appropriate setting in his pages. But we have to infer their exquisite appreciation of country sights and sounds from such brief utterances, or from passing allusions in dramatic scenes. Nobody can doubt that Shakespeare loved daffodils, or a bank of wild thyme, or violets, as keenly as Wordsworth. When he happens to mention them, his voice trembles with fine emotion. But none of the poets of the time dared to

make a passion for the country the main theme of their more pretentious song. They thought it necessary to idealise and transmute ; to substitute an indefinite Arcadia for plain English fields, and to populate it with piping swains and nymphs, Corydons and Amorets and Phyllises. Poor Hodge or Cis were only allowed to appear when they were minded to indulge in a little broad comedy. The coarse rustics had to be washed and combed before they could present themselves before an aristocratic audience ; and plain English hills and rivers to be provided with tutelary gods and goddesses, fitted for the gorgeous pageantry of a country masque. Far be it from me—with the fear of æsthetic critics before my eyes—to say that very beautiful poems might not be produced under these conditions. It is proper, as I am aware, to admire Browne's "Britannia's Pastorals," and to speak reverently of Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess," and Ben Jonson's "Sad Shepherd." I only venture to suggest here that such work is *caviare* to the multitude ; that it requires a fine literary sense, a happy superiority to dull realistic suggestion, and a power of accepting the conventional conditions which the artist has to accept for his guidance. Possibly I may go so far as to hint without offence that the necessity of using this artificial apparatus was not in itself an advantage. A great master of harmony, with a mind overflowing with majestic imagery, might achieve such triumphs as "Comus" and "Lycidas," in which even the Arcadian pipe is made to utter the true organ-tones. We forgive any incongruities or artificialities when they are lost in such a blaze of poetry. The atmosphere of Arcadia was not as yet sickly enough to asphyxiate a Milton ; but it was ceasing to be wholesome ; and the weaker singers who imbibed it suffered under distinct attacks of drowsiness.

Walton's good sense, or his humility, or perhaps the simple ardour of his devotion to his hobby, encouraged

him to deal in realities. He gave the genuine sentiment which his contemporaries would only give indirectly, transfigured and bedizened with due ornaments of classic or romantic pattern. There is just a faint touch of unreality—a barely perceptible flavour of the sentimental—about his personages; but only enough to give a permissible touch of pastoral idealism. Walton is painting directly from the life. The "honest alehouse," where he finds "a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck about the wall," was standing then on the banks of the Lea, as in quiet country nooks, here and there, occasional representatives of the true angler's rest are still to be found, not entirely corrupted by the modern tourist. The good man is far too much in earnest to be aiming at literary ornament; he is a genuine simple-minded enthusiast revealing his kindly nature by a thousand unconscious touches. The common objection is a misunderstanding. Everybody quotes the phrase about using the frog "as though you loved him;" and it is the more piquant as following one of his characteristically pious remarks. The frog's mouth, he tells, grows up for six months, and he lives for six months without eating, "sustained, none but He whose name is Wonderful knows how." He reverently admires the care taken of the frog by Providence, without drawing any more inference for his own conduct than if he were a modern physiologist. It is just this absolute unconsciousness which makes his love of the sport attractive. He has never looked at it from the frog's point of view. Your modern angler has to excuse himself by some scientific hypothesis as to feeling in the lower animals, and thereby betrays certain qualms of conscience which had not yet come to light in Walton's day. He is no more cruel than a schoolboy, "ere he grows to pity." He is simply discharging his functions as a part of nature, like the pike or the frog; and convinced, at the very bottom of his heart, that the angler

represents the most eminent type of enjoyment, and should be the humble inheritor of the virtues of the fishers of Galilee. The gentlest and most pious thoughts come naturally into his mind whilst his worm is wriggling on his hook to entice the luckless trout. It is particularly pleasant to notice the quotations, which give a certain air of learning to his book. We see that the love of angling had become so ingrained in his mind as to direct his reading as well as to provide him with amusement. We fancy him poring on winter evenings over the pages of Aldrovandus and Gesner and Pliny and Topsell's histories of serpents and four-footed beasts, and humbly accepting the teaching of more learned men, who had recorded so many strange facts unobserved by the simple angler. He produces a couple of bishops, Dubravius and Thurso, as eye-witnesses, to testify to a marvellous anecdote of a frog jumping upon a pike's head and tearing out his eyes, after "expressing malice or anger by swollen cheeks and staring eyes." Even Walton cannot forbear a quiet smile at this quaint narrative. But he is ready to believe, in all seriousness, that eels, "like some kinds of bees and wasps," are bred out of dew, and to confirm it by the parallel case of young goslings bred by the sun "from the rotten planks of an old ship and hatched up trees." Science was not a dry museum of hard facts, but a quaint storehouse of semi-mythical curiosities; and therefore excellently fitted to fill spare hours, when he could not meditatively indulge in "the contemplative man's recreation." Walton found some queer text for his pious meditations, and his pursuit is not without its drawbacks. But his quaintness only adds a zest to our enjoyment of his book; and we are content to fall in with his humour, and to believe for the nonce that the love of a sport which so fascinates this simple, kindly, reverent nature must be, as he takes for granted, the very crowning grace of a character moulded on the

principles of sound Christian philosophy. Angling becomes synonymous with purity of mind and simplicity of character.

Mr. Lowell, in one of the most charming essays ever written about a garden, takes his text from White of Selborne, and admirably explains the charm of that worthy representative of the Waltonian spirit. "It is good for us now and then," says Mr. Lowell, "to converse in a world like Mr. White's, where man is the least important of animals;" to find one's whole world in a garden, beyond the reach of wars and rumours of wars. White does not give a thought to the little troubles which were disturbing the souls of Burke and George III. The "natural term of a hog's life has more interest for him than that of an empire;" he does not trouble his head about diplomatic complications whilst he is discovering that the odd tumbling of rooks in the air is caused by their turning over to scratch themselves with one claw. The great events of his life are his making acquaintance with a stilted plover, or his long—for it was protracted over ten years—and finally triumphant passion for "an old family tortoise." White of Selborne did not live in the rough old days when a country house had occasionally to be a fastness; nor in our own, when he would have to consider whether his property ought not to be "nationalised." He was merely a good, kindly, domestic gentleman, on friendly terms with the parson and the gamekeeper, and ready for a chat with the rude forefathers of the hamlet. His horizon, natural and unnatural, is bounded by the soft round hills and the rich hangers of his beloved Hampshire country. There is something specially characteristic in his taste for scenery. Though "I have now travelled the Sussex Downs upwards of thirty years," he says, "I still investigate that chain of majestic mountains with fresh admiration year by year;" and he calls "Mr. Ray" to witness that there is nothing finer in any part of

Europe. "For my own part," he says, "I think there is somewhat peculiarly sweet and amusing in the shapely figured aspects of chalk hills in preference to those of stone, which are rugged, broken, abrupt, and shapeless." I, for my part, agree with Mr. White—so long, at least, as I am reading his book. The Downs have a singular charm in the exquisite play of long, gracefully undulating lines which bound their gentle edges. If not a "majestic range of mountains," as judged by an Alpine standard, there is no want of true sublimity in their springing curves, especially when harmonised by the lights and shadows under cloud-masses driving before a broad south-westerly gale; and when you reach the edge of a great down, and suddenly look down into one of the little hollows where a village with a grey church tower and a grove of noble elms nestles amidst the fold of the hills, you fancy that in such places of refuge there must still be relics of the quiet domesticities enjoyed by Gilbert White. Here, one fancies, it must be good to live; to discharge, at an easy rate, all the demands of a society which is but a large family, and find ample excitement in studying the rambles of a tortoise, forming intimacies with moles, crickets and fieldmice, and bats, and brown owls, and watching the swifts and the nightjars wheeling round the old church tower, or hunting flies at the edge of the wood in the quiet summer evening.

In rambling through the lanes sacred to the memory of White, you may (in fancy, at least) meet another figure not at first sight quite in harmony with the clerical Mr. White. He is a stalwart, broad-chested man in the farmer's dress, even ostentatiously representing the old British yeoman brought up on beer and beef, and with a certain touch of pugnacity suggestive of the retired prize-fighter. He stops his horse to chat with a labourer breaking stones by the roadside, and informs the gaping rustic that wages are made bad and food dear by the

diabolical machinations of the Tories, and the fundholders and the boroughmongers, who are draining away all the fatness of the land to nourish the portentous "wen" called London. He leaves the man to meditate on this suggestion, and jogs off to the nearest country town, where he will meet the farmers at their ordinary, and deliver a ranting radical address. The squire or the parson who recognises William Cobbett in this sturdy traveller, will mutter a hearty objurgation, and wish that the disturber of rustic peace could make a closer acquaintance with the neighbouring horsepond. Possibly most readers who hear his name have vaguely set down Cobbett as one of the demagogues of the anti-reforming days, and remember little more than the fact that he dabbled in some rather questionable squabbles, and brought back Tom Paine's bones from America. But it is worth while to read Cobbett, and especially the "Rural Rides," not only to enjoy his fine homespun English, but to learn to know the man a little better. Whatever the deserts or demerits of Cobbett as a political agitator, the true man was fully as much allied to modern Young England and the later type of conservatism as to the modern radical. He hated the Scotch "feelosophers"—as he calls them—Parson Malthus, the political communists, the Manchester men, the men who would break up the old social system of the country, at the bottom of his heart; and, whatever might be his superficial alliances, he loved the old quiet country life when Englishmen were burly, independent yeomen, each equal to three frog-eating Frenchmen. He remembered the relics of the system in the days of his youth; he thought that it had begun to decay at the time of the Reformation, when grasping landlords and unprincipled statesmen had stolen Church property on pretence of religion; but ever since, the growth of manufactures, and corruption, and stock-jobbing had been unpopulating the country to swell the

towns, and broken up the old, wholesome, friendly English life. That is the text on which he is always dilating with genuine enthusiasm, and the belief, true or false, gives a pleasant flavour to his intense relish for true country scenery.

He looks at things, it is true, from the point of view of a farmer, not of a landscape-painter or a lover of the picturesque. He raves against that "accursed hill" Hindhead; he swears that he will not go over it; and he tells us very amusingly how, in spite of himself, he found himself on the very "tip top" of it, in a pelting rain, owing to an incompetent guide. But he loves the woodlands and the downs, and bursts into vivid enthusiasm at fine points of view. He is specially ecstatic in White's country. "On we trotted," he says, "up this pretty green lane, and, indeed, we had been coming gently and gradually up-hill for a good while. The lane was between high banks, and pretty high stuff growing on the banks, so that we could see no distance from us, and could receive not the smallest hint of what was so near at hand. The lane had a little turn towards the end, so that we came, all in a moment, at the very edge of the hanger; and never in my life was I so surprised and delighted! I pulled up my horse, and sat and looked. It was like looking from the top of a castle down into the sea, except that the valley was land and not water. I looked at my servant to see what effect this unexpected sight had upon him. His surprise was as great as mine, though he had been bred amongst the North Hampshire hills. Those who have so strenuously dwelt on the dirt and dangers of this road have said not a word about the beauties, the matchless beauties, of the scenery." And Cobbett goes on to describe the charms of the view over Selborne, and to fancy what it will be "when trees, and hangers, and hedges are in leaf, the corn waving, the meadows bright, and the hops upon the poles," in

language which is not after the modern style of word-painting, but excites a contagious enthusiasm by its freshness and sincerity. He is equally enthusiastic soon afterwards at the sight of Avington Park and a lake swarming with wild fowl; and complains of the folly of modern rapid travelling. "In any sort of carriage you cannot get into the *real country places*. To travel in stage-coaches is to be hurried along by force in a box with an air-hole in it, and constantly exposed to broken limbs, the danger being much greater than that of ship-board, and the noise much more disagreeable, while the company is frequently not a great deal more to one's liking." What would Cobbett have said to a railway? And what has become of the old farmhouse on the banks of the Mole, once the home of "plain manners and plentiful living," with "oak clothes-chests, oak bedsteads, oak chests of drawers, and oak tables to eat on, long, strong, and well supplied with joint stools?" Now, he sighs, there is a "*parlour!* aye, and a *carpet*, and *bell-pull* too! and a mahogany table, and the fine chairs, and the fine glass, and all as barefaced upstart as any stockjobber in the kingdom can boast of!" Probably the farmhouse has followed the furniture, and, meanwhile, what has become of the fine old British hospitality, when the farmer and his lads and lasses dined at one table, and a solid Englishman did not squeeze money out of his men's wages to surround himself with trumpery finery?

To say the truth, Cobbett's fine flow of invective is a little too exuberant, and overlays too deeply the picturesque touches of scenery and the occasional bits of autobiography which recall his boyish experience of the old country life. It would be idle to inquire how far his vision of the old English country had any foundation in fact. Our hills and fields may be as lovely as ever; and there is still ample room for the lovers of "nature" in Scotch moors and lochs, or even amongst the English

fells, or among the storm-beaten cliffs of Devon and Cornwall. But nature, as I have said, is not the country. We are not in search of the scenery which appears now as it appeared in the remote days when painted savages managed to raise a granite block upon its supports for the amusement of future antiquaries. We want the country which bears the impress of some characteristic social growth; which has been moulded by its inhabitants as the inhabitants by it, till one is as much adapted to the other as the lichen to the rock on which it grows. How bleak and comfortless a really natural country may be is apparent to the readers of Thoreau. He had all the will to become a part of nature, and to shake himself free from the various trammels of civilised life, and he had no small share of the necessary qualifications; but one cannot read his account of his life by Walden pond without a shivering sense of discomfort. He is not really acclimatised; so far from being a true child of nature, he is a man of theories, a product of the social state against which he tries to revolt. He does not so much relish the wilderness as to go out into the wilderness in order to rebuke his contemporaries. There is something harsh about him and his surroundings, and he affords an unconscious proof that something more is necessary for the civilised man who would become a true man of the woods than simply to strip off his clothes. He has got tolerably free from tailors; but he still lives in the intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge debating-rooms.

To find a life really in harmony with a rustic environment, we must not go to raw settlements where man is still fighting with the outside world, but to some region where a reconciliation has been worked out by an experience of centuries. And amidst all the restlessness of modern improvers we may still find a few regions where the old genius has not been quite exorcised. Here and there, in country lanes, and on the edge of unenclosed

commons, we may still meet the gipsy—the type of a race adapted to live in the interstices of civilisation, having something of the indefinable grace of all wild animals, and yet free from the absolute savagery of the genuine wilderness. To mention gipsies is to think of George Borrow; and I always wonder that the author of the "Bible in Spain" and "Lavengro" is not more popular. Certainly, I have found no more delightful guide to the charming nooks and corners of rural England. I would give a good deal to identify that remarkable dingle in which he met so singular a collection of characters. Does it really exist, I wonder, anywhere on this island? or did it ever exist? and, if so, has it become a railway-station, and what has become of Isopel Berners and "Blazing Bosville, the flaming Tinman?" His very name is as good as a poem, and the battle in which Borrow floored the Tinman by that happy left-handed blow is, to my mind, more delightful than the fight in "Tom Brown," or that in which Dobbin acted as the champion of Osborne. Borrow is a "humourist" of the first water. He lives in a world of his own—a queer world with laws peculiar to itself, and yet one which has all manner of odd and unexpected points of contact with the prosaic world of daily experience. Borrow's Bohemianism is no revolt against the established order. He does not invoke nature or fly to the hedges because society is corrupt or the world unsatisfying, or because he has some kind of new patent theory of life to work out. He cares nothing for such fancies. On the contrary, he is a staunch conservative, full of good old-fashioned prejudices. He seems to be a case of the strange reappearance of an ancestral instinct under altered circumstances. Some of his forefathers must have been gipsies by temperament if not by race; and the impulses due to that strain have got themselves blended with the characteristics of the average Englishman. The result is

a strange and yet, in a way, harmonious and original type which made the "Bible in Spain" a puzzle to the average reader. The name suggested a work of the edifying class. Here was a good respectable emissary of the Bible Society going to convert poor papists by a distribution of the Scriptures. He has returned to write a long tract setting forth the difficulties of his enterprise, and the stiff-neckedness of the Spanish people. The luckless reader who took up the book on that understanding was destined to a strange disappointment. True, Borrow appeared to take his enterprise quite seriously, indulges in the proper reflections, and gets into the regulation difficulty involving an appeal to the British minister. But it soon appears that his Protestant zeal is somehow mixed up with a passion for strange wanderings in the queerest of company. To him Spain is not the land of staunch Catholicism, or of Cervantes, or of Velasquez, and still less a country of historic or political interest. Its attraction is in the picturesque outcasts who find ample roaming-ground in its wilder regions. He regards them, it is true, as occasional subjects for a little proselytism. He tells us how he once delivered a moving address to the gipsies in their own language. To this most promising congregation, when he had finished, he looked up and found himself the centre of all eyes, each pair contorted by a hideous squint, rivalling each other in frightfulness; and the performance, which he seems to have thoroughly appreciated, pretty well expressed the gipsy view of his missionary enterprise. But they delighted to welcome him in his other character as one of themselves, and yet as dropping amongst them from the hostile world outside. And, certainly, no one not thoroughly at home with gipsy ways, gipsy modes of thought, to whom it comes quite naturally to put up in a den of cutthroats, or to enter the field of his missionary enterprise in company with a professional brigand travelling

on business, could have given us so singular a glimpse of the most picturesque elements of a strange country. Your respectable compiler of handbooks might travel for years in the same districts all unconscious that passing vagabonds were so fertile in romance. The freemasonry which exists amongst the class lying outside the pale of respectability enables Borrow to fall in with adventures full of mysterious fascination. He passes through forests at night, and his horse suddenly stops and trembles, whilst he hears heavy footsteps and rustling branches, and some heavy body is apparently dragged across the road by panting but invisible bearers. He enters a shadowy pass, and is met by a man with a face streaming with blood, who implores him not to go forwards into the hands of a band of robbers; and Borrow is too sleepy and indifferent to stop, and jogs on in safety without meeting the knife which he half expected. "It was not so written," he says, with the genuine fatalism of your hand-to-mouth Bohemian. He crosses a wild moor with a half-witted guide, who suddenly deserts him at a little tavern. After a wild gallop on a pony, apparently half-witted also, he at last rejoins the guide resting by a fountain. This gentleman condescends to explain that he is in the habit of bolting after a couple of glasses, and never stops till he comes to running water. The congenial pair lose themselves at nightfall, and the guide observes that if they should meet the Estadéa, which are spirits of the dead riding with candles in their hands—a phenomenon happily rare in this region—he shall "run and run till he drowns himself in the sea, somewhere near Muros." The Estadéa do not appear, but Borrow and his guide come near being hanged as Don Carlos and a nephew, escaping only by the help of a sailor who knows the English words knife and fork, and can therefore testify to Borrow's nationality; and is finally liberated by an official who is a devoted student of

Jeremy Bentham. The queer stumbling upon a name redolent of every-day British life throws the surrounding oddity into quaint relief. But Borrow encounters more mysterious characters. There is the wondrous Abarbenell, whom he meets riding by night, and with whom he soon becomes hand and glove. Abarbenell is a huge figure in a broad-brimmed hat, who stares at him in the moonlight with deep calm eyes, and still revisits him in dreams. He has two wives and a hidden treasure of old coins, and when the gates of his house are locked, and the big dogs loose in the court, he dines off ancient plate made before the discovery of America. There are many of his race amongst the priesthood, and even an Archbishop, who died in great renown for sanctity, had come by night to kiss his father's hand. Nor can any reader forget the singular history of Benedict Mol, the wandering Swiss, who turns up now and then in the course of his search for the hidden treasure at Compostella. Men who live in strange company learn the advantage of not asking questions, or following out delicate inquiries; and these singular figures are the more attractive because they come and go, half-revealing themselves for a moment, and then vanishing into outside mystery; as the narrator himself sometimes merges into the regions of absolute commonplace, and then dives down below the surface into the remotest recesses of the social labyrinth.

In Spain there may be room for such wild adventures. In the trim, orderly, English country we might fancy they had gone out with the fairies. And yet Borrow meets a decayed pedlar in Spain who seems to echo his own sentiments; and tells him that even the most prosperous of his tribe who have made their fortunes in America, return in their dreams to the green English lanes and farmyards. "There they are with their boxes on the ground displaying their goods to the honest rustics and their dames and their daughters, and selling away

and chaffering and laughing just as of old. And there they are again at nightfall in the hedge alehouses, eating their toasted cheese and their bread, and drinking the Suffolk ale, and listening to the roaring song and merry jests of the labourers." It is the old picturesque country life which fascinates Borrow, and he was fortunate enough to plunge into the heart of it before it had been frightened away by the railways. "Lavengro" is a strange medley, which is nevertheless charming by reason of the odd idiosyncrasy which fits the author to interpret this fast vanishing phase of life. It contains queer controversial irrelevance—conversations or stories which may or may not be more or less founded on fact, tending to illustrate the pernicious propagandism of Popery, the evil done by Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the melancholy results of the decline of pugilism. And then we have satire of a simple kind upon literary craftsmen, and excursions into philology which show at least an amusing dash of innocent vanity. But the oddity of these quaint utterances of a humourist who seeks to find the most congenial mental food in the Bible, the Newgate Calendar, and in old Welsh literature, is in thorough keeping with the situation. He is the genuine tramp whose experience is naturally made up of miscellaneous waifs and strays; who drifts into contact with the most eccentric beings, and parts company with them at a moment's notice, or catching hold of some stray bit of out-of-the-way knowledge follows it up as long as it amuses him. He is equally at home compounding narratives of the lives of eminent criminals for London booksellers, or making acquaintance with thimbleriggers, or pugilists, or Armenian merchants, or becoming a hermit in his remote dingle, making his own shoes and discussing theology with a postboy, a feminine tramp, and a Jesuit in disguise. The compound is too quaint for fiction, but is made interesting by the quaint vein of

simplicity and the touch of genius which brings out the picturesque side of his roving existence, and yet leaves one in doubt how far the author appreciates his own singularity. One old gipsy lady in particular, who turns up at intervals, is as fascinating as Meg Merrilees, and at once made life-like and more mysterious. "My name is Herne, and I comes of the hairy ones!" are the remarkable words by which she introduces herself. She bitterly regrets the intrusion of a Gentile into the secrets of the Romanies, and relieves her feelings by administering poison to the intruder, and then trying to poke out his eye as he is lying apparently in his last agonies. But she seems to be highly respected by her victim as well as by her own people, and to be acting in accordance with the moral teaching of her tribe. Her design is frustrated by the appearance of a Welsh Methodist preacher, who, like every other strange being, is at once compelled to unbosom himself to this odd confessor. He fancies himself to have committed the unpardonable sin at the age of six, and is at once comforted by Borrow's sensible observation that he should not care if he had done the same thing twenty times over at the same period. The grateful preacher induces his consoler to accompany him to the borders of Wales; but there Borrow suddenly stops on the ground that he should prefer to enter Wales in a suit of superfine black, mounted on a powerful steed like that which bore Greduv to the fight of Catrath, and to be welcomed at a dinner of the bards, as the translator of the odes of the great Ab Gwilym. And Mr. Petulengro opportunely turns up at the instant, and Borrow rides back with him, and hears that Mrs. Herne has hanged herself, and celebrates the meeting by a fight without gloves, but in pure friendliness, and then settles down to the life of a blacksmith in his secluded dingle.

Certainly it is a queer topsy-turvy world to which we are introduced in "Lavengro." It gives the reader

the sensation of a strange dream in which all the miscellaneous population of caravans and wayside tents make their exits and entrances at random, mixed with such eccentrics as the distinguished author, who has a mysterious propensity for touching odd objects as a charm against evil. All one's ideas are dislocated when the centre of interest is no longer in the thick of the crowd, but in that curious limbo whither drift all the odd personages who live in the interstices without being caught by the meshes of the great network of ordinary convention. Perhaps the oddity repels many readers; but to me it always seems that Borrow's dingle represents a little oasis of genuine romance—a kind of half-visionary fragment of fairyland, which reveals itself like the enchanted castle in the vale of St. John, and then vanishes after tantalising and arousing one's curiosity. It will never be again discovered by any flesh-and-blood traveller; but, in my imaginary travels, I like to rusticate there for a time, and to feel as if the gipsy was the true possessor of the secret of life, and we who travel by rail and read newspapers and consider ourselves to be sensible men of business, were but vexatious intruders upon this sweet dream. There must, one supposes, be a history of England from the Petulengro point of view, in which the change of dynasties recognised by Hume and Mr. Freeman, or the oscillations of power between Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Gladstone, appear in relative insignificance as more or less affecting certain police regulations and the inclosure of commons. It is pleasant for a time to feel as though the little rivulet were the main stream, and the social outcast the true centre of society. The pure flavour of the country life is only perceptible when one has annihilated all disturbing influences; and in that little dingle with its solitary forge beneath the woods haunted by the hairy Hernes, that desirable result may be achieved for a time, even in a London library.

GEORGE ELIOT

Had we been asked a few weeks ago to name the greatest living writer of English fiction, the answer would have been unanimous. No one—whatever might be his special personal predilections—would have refused that title to George Eliot. To ask the same question now would be to suggest some measure of our loss. In losing George Eliot we have probably lost the greatest woman who ever won literary fame, and one of the very few writers of our day to whom the name "great" could be conceded with any plausibility. We are not at a sufficient distance from the object of our admiration to measure its true elevation. We are liable to a double illusion on the morrow of such events. In political life we fancy that all heroism is extinct with the dead leader, whilst there are within the realm five hundred good as he. Yet the most daring optimist can hardly suppose that consolatory creed to be generally true in literature. If contemporaries sometimes exaggerate, they not unfrequently under-estimate their loss. When Shakespeare died, nobody imagined—we may suspect—that the English drama had touched its highest point. When men are crossing the lines which divide one of the fruitful from one of the barren epochs in literature, they are often but faintly conscious of the change. It would require no paradoxical ingenuity to maintain that we are even now going through such a transition. The works of George Eliot may hereafter appear as marking the termination of the great period of

English fiction which began with Scott. She may hereafter be regarded as the last great sovereign of a literary dynasty, who had to bequeath her sceptre to a comparatively petty line of successors: though—for anything that we can say to the contrary—it may also be true that the successor may appear to-morrow, or may even be now amongst us in the shape of some writer who is struggling against a general want of recognition.

Ephemeral critics must not pretend to pronounce too confidently upon such questions. They can only try to say, in Mr. Browning's phrase, how it strikes a contemporary. And a contemporary is prompted by the natural regret to stray into irrelevant reflections, and dwell needlessly in the regions of might-have-beens. Had George Eliot lived a little longer, or begun to write a little earlier, or been endowed with some additional quality which she did not in fact possess, she might have done greater things still. It is very true, and true of others besides George Eliot. It often seems as if even the greatest works of the greatest writers were but fragmentary waifs and strays—mere indications of more splendid achievements which would have been within their grasp, had they not been forced, like weaker people, to feel out the way to success through comparative failure, or to bend their genius to unworthy tasks. So, of the great writers in her own special department, Fielding wasted his powers in writing third-rate plays till he was five-and-thirty, and died a broken-down man at forty-seven. Scott did not appear in the field of his greatest victories till he was forty-three, and all his really first-rate work was done within the next ten years. George Eliot's period of full activity, the time during which she was conscientiously doing her best under the stimulus of high reputation, lasted some twenty years; and so long a space is fully up to the average of the time allowed to most great writers. If not a voluminous writer, according

to the standard of recent novelists, she has left enough work, representative of her powers at their best, to give a full impress of her mind.

So far, I think, we have little reason for regret. When once a writer has managed to express the best that was in him to say, the question of absolute mass is trifling. Though some very great have also been very voluminous writers, the immortal part of their achievement bears a slight proportion to the whole. It is melancholy to look at the "complete works" of famous writers and compute the quantity of comparative rubbish that has been piled over the jewels. Hardly any great English writer has left a greater quantity of work representing the highest level of the author's capacity than is equivalent to the "Scenes of Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," the "Mill on the Floss," "Silas Marner," "Romola," and "Middlemarch." Certainly, she might have done more. She did not begin to write novels till a period at which many popular authors are already showing symptoms of exhaustion, and indulging in the perilous practice of self-imitation. Why, it may be said, did not George Eliot write immortal works in her youth, instead of translating German authors of a heterodox tendency? If we could arrange all such things to our taste and could foresee a writer's powers from the beginning, we might have ordered matters differently. Yet one may observe that there is another side to the question. Imaginative minds often ripen quickly; and much of the finest poetry in the language derives its charm from the freshness of youth. But writers of the contemplative order—those whose best works represent the general experience of a rich and thoughtful nature—may be expected to come later to their maturity. The phenomenon of early exhaustion is too common in these days to allow us to regret an occasional exception. If during her youth George Eliot was storing the thoughts and emotions

which afterwards shaped themselves into the "Scenes of Clerical Life," we need not suppose that the time was wasted. Certainly, I do not think that anyone who has had a little experience in such matters would regard it as otherwise than dangerous for a powerful mind to be precipitated into public utterance. The Pythagorean probation of silence may be protracted too long; but it may afford a most useful discipline; and I think that there is nothing preposterous in the supposition that George Eliot's work was all the more powerful because it came from a novelist who had lain fallow through a longer period than ordinary.

If it is rather idle to pursue such speculations, it is still more idle to indulge in that kind of criticism which virtually comes to saying that George Eliot ought to have been Walter Scott or Charlotte Brontë. You may think her inferior to those writers; you may dislike her philosophy or her character; and you are fully justified in expressing your dislike. But it is only fair to ask whether the qualities which you disapprove were mere external and adventitious familiarities or the inseparable adjunct of those which you admire. It is important to remember this in considering some of the common criticisms. The poor woman was not content simply to write amusing stories. She is convicted upon conclusive evidence of having indulged in ideas; she ventured to speculate upon human life and its meaning, and still worse, she endeavoured to embody her convictions in imaginative shapes, and probably wished to infect her readers with them. This was, according to some people, highly unbecoming in a woman and very inartistic in a novelist. I confess that, for my part, I am rather glad to find ideas anywhere. They are not very common; and there are a vast number of excellent fictions which these sensitive critics may study without the least danger of a shock to their artistic sensibilities by anything of the kind. But if you will permit a poor novelist to indulge in such

awkward possessions, I cannot see why he or she should not be allowed occasionally to interweave them in her narrative, taking care of course to keep them in their proper place. Some of that mannerism which offends many critics represents in fact simply George Eliot's way of using this privilege. We are indeed told dogmatically that a novelist should never indulge in little asides to the reader. Why not? One main advantage of a novel, as it seems to me, is precisely that it leaves room for a freedom in such matters which is incompatible with the requirements, for example, of dramatic writing. I can enjoy Scott's downright story-telling, which never reminds you obtrusively of the presence of the author; but with all respect for Scott, I do not see why his manner should be the sole type and model for all his successors. I like to read about Tom Jones or Colonel Newcome; but I am also very glad when Fielding or Thackeray puts his puppets aside for the moment and talks to me in his own person. A child, it is true, dislikes to have the illusion broken, and is angry if you try to persuade him that Giant Despair was not a real personage like his favourite Blunderbore. But the attempt to produce such illusions is really unworthy of work intended for full-grown readers. The humourist in particular knows that you will not mistake his puppet-show for reality, nor does he wish you to do so. He is rather of opinion that the world itself is a greater puppet-show, not to be taken in too desperate earnest. It is congenial to his whole mode of thought to act occasionally as chorus, and dwell upon some incidental suggestion. The solemn critic may step forward, like the physician who attended Sancho Panza's meal, and waive aside the condiment which gives a peculiar relish to the feast. It is not prepared according to his recipe. But till he gives me some better reason for obedience than his *ipse dixit*, I shall refuse to respect what would destroy many charming passages and obliterate touches which

clearly contribute to the general effect of George Eliot's work.

Were it not indeed that some critics in authority have dwelt upon this supposed defect, I should be disposed simply to plead "not guilty," for I think that anyone who reads the earlier books with the criticism in his mind, and notes the passages which are really obnoxious upon this ground, will be surprised at the rarity of the passages to which it applies. One cannot help suspecting that what is really offensive is not so much the method itself as the substance of the reflections introduced, and occasionally the cumbrous style in which they are expressed. And upon these points there is more to be said. But it is more desirable, if one can do it, to say what George Eliot was than what she was not; and to try to catch the secret of her unique power rather than to dwell upon shortcomings, some of which, to say the truth, are so obvious that it requires little critical acumen to discover them, and a decided tinge of antipathy to dwell upon them at length.

What is it, in fact, which makes us conscious that George Eliot had a position apart; that, in a field where she had so many competitors of no mean capacity, she stands out as superior to all her rivals; or that, whilst we can easily imagine that many other reputations will fade with a change of fashion, there is something in George Eliot which we are confident will give delight to our grandchildren as it has to ourselves? To such questions there is one obvious answer at hand. There is one part of her writings upon which every competent reader has dwelt with delight, and which seems fresher and more charming whenever we come back to it. There is no danger of arousing any controversy in saying that the works of her first period, the "Scenes of Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," "Silas Marner," and the "Mill on the Floss," have the unmistakable mark of high genius. They

are something for which it is simply out of the question to find any substitute. Strike them out of English literature, and we feel that there would be a gap not to be filled up; a distinct vein of thought and feeling unrepresented; a characteristic and delightful type of social development left without any adequate interpreter. A second-rate writer can be more or less replaced. When you have read Shakespeare, you can do very well without Beaumont and Fletcher, and a study of the satires of Pope makes it unnecessary to plod through the many volumes filled by his imitators. But we feel that, however much we may admire the other great English novelists, there is none who would make the study of George Eliot superfluous. The sphere which she has made specially her own is that quiet English country life which she knew in early youth. It has been described with more or less vivacity and sympathy by many observers. Nobody has approached George Eliot in the power of seizing its essential characteristics and exhibiting its real charm. She has done for it what Scott did for the Scotch peasantry, or Fielding for the eighteenth-century Englishman, or Thackeray for the higher social stratum of his time. Its last traces are vanishing so rapidly amidst the changes of modern revolution that its picture could hardly be drawn again, even if there were an artist of equal skill and penetration. And thus, when the name of George Eliot is mentioned, it calls up, to me at least, and, I suspect, to most readers, not so much her later and more ambitious works, as the exquisite series of scenes so lovingly and vividly presented in the earlier stage: snuffy old Mr. Gilfil, drinking his gin-and-water in his lonely parlour and dreaming of the early romance of his life, with his faithful Ponto snoring on the rug; and the inimitable Mrs. Poyser in her exquisite dairy, delivering her soul in a series of pithy aphorisms, bright as the little flames in Mr. Biglow's pastoral, that "danced about the

chaney on the dresser;" and the party in the parlour of the "Rainbow" discussing the evidences for "ghos'es;" or the family conclaves in which the affairs of the Tulliver family were discussed from so many and such admirably contrasted points of view. Where shall we find a more delightful circle, or quainter manifestations of human character, in beings grotesque, misshapen, and swathed in old prejudices, like the mossy trees in an old-fashioned orchard, which, for all their vagaries of growth, are yet full of sap and capable of bearing mellow and toothsome fruit? "It was pleasant to Mr. Tryan," as we are told in "Janet's Repentance," "to listen to the simple chat of the old man—to walk in the shade of the incomparable orchard and hear the story of the crops yielded by the red-streaked apple-tree, and the quite embarrassing plentifulness of the summer pears—to drink in the sweet evening breath of the garden as they sat in the alcove—and so, for a short interval, to feel the strain of his pastoral task relaxed." Our enjoyment is analogous to Mr. Tryan's. We are soothed by the atmosphere of the old-world country life, where people, no doubt, had as many troubles as ours, but troubles which, because they were different, seem more bearable to our imagination. We half wish that we could go back to the old days of stage-coaches and waggons and shambling old curates in "Brutus wigs" preaching to slumbrous congregations enshrouded in high-backed pews, contemplating as little the advent of railways as of a race of clergymen capable of going to prison upon a question of ritual.

So far, indeed, it can hardly be said that George Eliot is unique. She has been approached, if she has not been surpassed, by other writers in her idyllic effects. But there is something less easily paralleled in the peculiar vein of humour which is the essential complement of the more tender passages. Mrs. Poyser is necessary to balance the solemnity of Dinah Morris.

Silas Marner would lose half his impressiveness if he were not in contrast with the inimitable party in the "Rainbow" parlour. Omit the few pages in which their admirable conversation is reported, and the whole harmony of the book would be altered. The change would be as fatal as to strike out a figure in some perfect composition, where the most trifling accessory may really be an essential part of the whole design. It might throw some light upon George Eliot's peculiar power if we could fairly analyse the charm of that little masterpiece. Psychologists are very fond of attempting to define the nature of wit and humour. Hitherto they have not been very successful, though of course their failure cannot be due to any want of personal appreciation of those qualities. But I should certainly despair of giving any account of the pleasure which one receives from that famous conflict of rustic wits. Why are we charmed by Ben Winthorp's retort to the parish clerk: "It's your inside as isn't right made for music; it's no better nor a hollow stalk;" and the statement that this "unflinching frankness was regarded by the company as the most piquant form of joke;" or by the landlord's ingenious remarks upon the analogy between a power of smelling cheeses and perceiving the supernatural; or by that quaint stumble into something surprising to the speaker himself by its apparent resemblance to witty repartee, when the same person says to the farrier: "You're a doctor, I reckon, though you're only a cow-doctor; for a fly's a fly, though it may be a horse-fly"? One can understand at a proper distance how a clever man comes to say a brilliant thing, and it is still more easy to understand how he can say a thoroughly silly thing, and, therefore, how he can simulate stupidity. But there is something mysterious in the power possessed by a few great humourists of converting themselves for the nonce into that peculiar condition of muddle-headedness dashed with grotesque flashes of

common-sense which is natural to a half-educated mind. It is less difficult to draw either a perfect circle or a purely arbitrary line than to see what will be the projection of the regular figure on some queer, lop-sided, and imperfectly-reflecting surface. And these quaint freaks of rustic intelligence seem to be rags and tatters of what would make wit and reason in a cultivated mind, but when put together in this grotesque kaleidoscopic confusion suggests, not simple nonsense, but a ludicrous parody of sense. To reproduce the effect, you have not simply to lower the activity of the reasoning machine, but to put it together on some essential plan, so as to bring out a new set of combinations distantly recalling the correct order. We require not a new defect of logic, but a new logical structure.

There is no answer to this as to any other such problems. It is enough to take note of the fact that George Eliot possessed a vein of humour, of which it is little to say that it is incomparably superior, in depth if not in delicacy, to that of any feminine writer. It is the humour of a calm contemplative mind, familiar with wide fields of knowledge and capable of observing the little dramas of rustic life from a higher standing-point. It is not—in these earlier books at any rate—that she obtrudes her acquirements upon us; for if here and there we find some of those scientific illusions which afterwards became a kind of mannerism, they are introduced without any appearance of forcing. It is simply that she is awake to those quaint aspects of the little world before her which only show their quaintness to the cultivated intellect. We feel that there must be a silent guest in the chimney-corner of the "Rainbow," so thoroughly at home with the natives as to put no stress upon their behaviour, and yet one who has travelled out of sight of the village spire and known the thoughts and feelings which are stirring in the great world outside. The guest can at once sympathise

and silently criticise; or rather, in the process of observation, carries on the two processes simultaneously by recognising at once the little oddities of the microcosm, and yet seeing them as merely one embodiment of the same thoughts and passions which present themselves on a larger scale elsewhere. It is in this happy combination of two characteristics often disjoined that we have one secret of George Eliot's power. There is the breadth of touch, the large minded equable spirit of loving contemplative thought, which is fully conscious of the narrow limitations of the actor's thoughts and habits, but does not cease on that account to sympathise with his joys and sorrows. We are on a petty stage, but not in a stifling atmosphere, and we are not called upon to accept the prejudices of the actors or to be angry with them, but simply to understand and be tolerant. We have neither the country idyll of the sentimentalist which charms us in some of George Sand's stories of French life, but in which our enjoyment is checked by the inevitable sense of unreality, nor the caricature of the satirist who is anxious to proclaim the truth that base passions and grovelling instincts are as common in country towns as in court and city. Everything is quietly set before us with a fine sense of its wider relations, and yet with a loving touch, significant of a pathetic yearning for the past, which makes the whole picture artistically charming. We are reminded in Mr. Gilfil's love-story how, whilst poor little Tina was fretting over her wrongs, the "stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening around." "What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest centre of quivering life in the water drop —hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty." It is this constant reference, tacit or express,

suggested by pathetic touches, and by humorous exhibition of the incongruities and contrasts of the little drama of village life to the outer world beyond, and to the wider universe in which it too is an atom, that distinctly raises George Eliot above the level of many merely picturesque descriptions of similar scenes. We feel that the artist is an intellectual elevation high enough to be beyond the illusions of the city fashion; but the singular charm springs out of the tender affection which reproduces the little world left so far behind and hallowed by the romance of early association.

George Eliot's own view of the matter is given in more than one of these objectionable "asides" of which we have had to speak. She entreats us to try to see the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, to be found in the experience of poor dingy Amos Barton. She rarely looks, she says, at "a bent old man or a wizened old woman" without seeing "the past of which they are the shrunken remnant; and the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems sometimes of feeble interest and significance compared with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe, and left the poor soul, like a dim and dusty stage, with all its sweet garden scenes and fair perspectives overturned and thrust out of sight." To reflect that we ought to see wizened old men and women with such eyes is of course easy enough; to have such eyes—really to see what we know that we ought to see—is to possess true genius. George Eliot is not laying down a philosophical maxim to be proved and illustrated, but is attempting to express the animating principle of a labour of love. Mr. Gilfil, the person who suggests this remark, is the embodiment of the abstract principle, and makes us feel that it is no empty profession. Everybody has noticed how admirably George Eliot has portrayed certain phases of religious feeling with which, in one sense, she had long ceased to sympathise. Amongst subsidiary actors in her

stories, none are more tenderly and lovingly touched than the old-fashioned parsons and Dissenting preachers—Barton and Gilfil and Tryan, and Irwin and Dinah Morris in "Adam Bede," and Mr. Lyon in "Felix Holt." I do not know that they or their successors would have much call to be grateful. For, in truth, it is plain enough that the interest is in the kindly old-fashioned parson, considered as a valuable factor in the social system, and that his creed is not taken to be the source of his strength; whilst the few Methodists and the brethren in Lantorn Yard are regarded as attaining a very imperfect and stammering version of truths capable of being very completely dissevered from their dogmatic teaching. In any case, her breach with the creed of her youth involved no breach of the ties formed by early reverence for its representatives. The change involved none of the bitterness which is sometimes generated by a spiritual revolt. Dickens—who is sometimes supposed to represent the version of modern Christianity—could apparently see nothing in a Dissenting preacher but an unctuous and sensual hypocrite—a vulgarised Tartufe such as Stiggins and Chadband. If George Eliot had been the mere didactic preacher of mere critics, she might have set before us mere portraits of spiritual pride or clerical charlatanism. But whatever her creed, she was too deep a humourist, too thoughtful and too tender, to fall into such an error. She never sinned against the "natural piety" which should bind our days together. The tender regard which she had retained for all the surroundings of her youth did not fail towards those whose teaching had once roused her reverence, and which could never become the objects of indiscriminate antipathy.

In this one may perhaps say George Eliot was a true woman. Women, indeed, can be fully as bitter in their resentment as the harsher sex; but their bitterness seems to be generated in the attempt to outdo their masculine

rivals, and to imply perverted rather than deficient sensibility. They seldom exhibit pachydermatous indifference to their neighbour's emotions. The so-called masculine quality in George Eliot—her wide and calm intelligence—was certainly combined with a thoroughly feminine nature; and the more one reads her books and notes her real triumphs, the more strongly this comes out. The poetry and pathos which she seeks to reveal under commonplace surroundings is found chiefly in feminine hearts. Each of the early books is the record of an ordeal endured by some suffering woman. In the "Scenes of Clerical Life" the interest really centres in the women whose fate is bound up with the acts of the clerical heroes; it is Janet and Molly Barton in whom we are really interested; and if poor little Tina is too weak to be a heroine, her vigorous struggle against the destinies is the pivot of the story. That George Eliot succeeded remarkably in some male portraits, and notably in Tom Tulliver, is undeniable. Yet the men were often simply women in disguise. The piquancy, for example, of the famous character of Tito is greatly due to the fact that he is the voluptuous, selfish, but sensitive character, not unfamiliar in the fiction which deals with social intrigues, but generally presented to us in feminine costume. We are told of Daniel Deronda, upon whose character an extraordinary amount of analysis is expended, that he combined a feminine affectionateness with masculine inflexibility. To our perceptions, the feminine vein becomes decidedly the most prominent; and this is equally true of such characters as Philip Wakem and Mr. Lyon. Adam Bede, indeed, to mention no one else, is a thorough man. He represents, it would seem, that ideal of masculine strength which Miss Brontë tried with curious want of success to depict in Louis Moore—the firm arm, the offer of which (as we are told *à propos* of Maggie Tulliver and the offensive Stephen Guest) has in it "something strangely winning to most women." Yet if

Adam Bede had shown less Christian forbearance to young Squire Donnithorne, we should have been more convinced that he was of masculine fibre throughout.

Here we approach more disputable matters. George Eliot's early books owe their charm to the exquisite painting of the old country-life—an achievement made possible by a tender imagination brooding over a vanishing past—but, if we may make the distinction, they owe their greatness to the insight into passions not confined to one race or period. Janet Dempster would lose much of her charm if she were transplanted from Milby to London; but she would still be profoundly interesting as representing a marked type of feminine character. Balzac—or somebody else—said, or is said to have said, that there were only seven possible plots in fiction. Without pledging oneself to the particular number, one may admit that the number of radically different motives is remarkably small. It may be added that even great writers rarely show their highest capacity in more than one of these typical situations. It is not hard to say which is George Eliot's favourite theme. We may call it—speaking with proper reserve—the woman in need of a confessor. We may have the comparatively shallow nature, the poor wilful little Tina, or Hetty or Tessa—the mere plaything of fate, whom we pity because in her childish ignorance she is apt, like little Red Riding-hood, to mistake the wolf for a friend, though not exactly to take him for a grandmother. Or we have the woman with noble aspirations—Janet, or Dinah, or Maggie, or Romola, or Dorothea, or—may we add ?—Daniel Deronda, who recognises more clearly her own need of guidance, and even in failure has the lofty air of martyrdom. It is in the setting such characters before us that George Eliot has achieved her highest triumphs, and made some of her most unmistakable failures. It is here that we meet the complaint that she is too analytic; that she takes the point of view of the confessor rather than the artist; and

is more anxious to probe the condition of her heroines' souls, to give us an accurate diagnosis of their spiritual complaints, and an account of their moral evolution, than to show us the character in action. If I must give my own view, I must venture a distinction. To say that George Eliot's stories are interesting as studies of human nature, is really to say little more than that they deserve serious attention. There are stories—and very excellent and amusing stories—which have comparatively little to do with character; histories of wondrous and moving events, where you are fascinated by the vivacity of the narrator without caring much for the passions of the actors—such stories, in fact, as compose the Arabian Nights, or the voluminous works of the admirable Alexandre Dumas. We do not care to understand Aladdin's sentiments, or to say how far he differed from Sinbad and Camaralzaman. The famous Musketeers have different parts to play, and so far different characters; but one does not care very much for their psychology. Still, every serious writer must derive his power from his insight into men and women. A Cervantes or Shakespeare, a Scott, a Fielding, a Richardson or Thackeray, command our attention by forcible presentation of certain types of character; and, so far, George Eliot's does not differ from her predecessors'. Nor, again, would any truly imaginative writer give us mere abstract analyses of character, instead of showing us the concrete person in action. If George Eliot has a tendency to this error, it does not appear in her early period. We can see any of her best characters as distinctly, we know them by direct vision as intimately, as we know any personage in real or fictitious history. We are not put off with the formulæ of their conduct, but persons are themselves revealed to us. Yet it is, I think, true that her stories are pre-eminently studies of character in this sense, that her main and conscious purpose is to set before us the living beings in what may

be called, with due apology, their statical relations—to show them, that is, in their quiet and normal state, not under the stress of exceptional events. When we once know Adam Bede or Dinah Morris, we care comparatively little for the development of the plot. Compare, for example, "Adam Bede" with the "Heart of Midlothian," the first half of which seems to me to be one of the very noblest of all fictions, though the latter part suffers from the conventional mad woman and the bit of commonplace intrigue which Scott fancied himself bound to introduce. Jeanie Deans is, to my mind, a more powerfully drawn and altogether a more substantial and satisfactory young woman than Dinah Morris, who, with all her merits, seems to me, I will confess, to be a bit of a prig. The contrast, however, to which I refer is in the method rather than in the characters or the situation. Scott wishes to interest us in the magnificent trial scene, for which all the preceding narrative is a preparation; he is content to set the Deans family before us with a few amazingly vigorous touches, so that we may thoroughly enter into the spirit of the tremendous ordeal through which poor Jeanie Deans is to pass in the conflict between affection and duty. We first learn to know her thoroughly by her behaviour under that overpowering strain. But in "Adam Bede" we learn first to know the main actors by their conduct in a number of little scenes, most admirably devised and drawn, and serving to bring out, if not a more powerful, a more elaborate and minute manifestation of their inmost feelings. When we come to the critical parts in the story, and the final catastrophe, they are less interesting and vivid than the preliminary detail of apparently insignificant events. The trial and the arrival of the reprieve are probably the weakest and most commonplace passages; and what we really remember and enjoy are the little scenes on the village green, in Mrs. Poyser's dairy, and Adam Bede's workshop.

We have there learnt to know the people themselves, and we scarcely care for what happens to them. The method is natural to a feminine observer who has learnt to interpret character by watching its manifestations in little every-day incidents, and feels comparatively at a loss when having to deal with the more exciting struggles and calamities which make a noise in the world. And therefore, as I think, George Eliot is always more admirable in careful exposition—in setting her personages before us—than in dealing with her catastrophes, where, to say the truth, she sometimes seems to become weak just when we expect her full powers to be exerted.

This is true, for example, of "Silas Marner," where the inimitable opening is very superior to the sequel. It is still more conspicuously true of the "Mill on the Floss." The first part of that novel appears to me to mark the culmination of her genius. So far, it is one of the rare books which it is difficult to praise in adequate language. We may naturally suspect that part of the singular vividness is due to some admixture of an autobiographical element. The sonnets called "Brother and Sister"—perhaps her most successful poetical effort—suggest that the adventures of Tom and Maggie had some counterpart in personal experience. In any case, the whole account of Maggie's childhood, the admirable pathos of the childish yearnings, and the quaint chorus of uncles and aunts, the adventure with the gipsies, the wanderings by the Floss, the visit to Tom in his school, have a freshness and brilliance of colouring, showing that the workmanship is as perfect as the sentiment is tender. But when Maggie ceases to be the most fascinating child in fiction, and becomes the heroine of a novel, the falling off is grievous. The unlucky affair with Stephen Guest is simply indefensible. It may, indeed, be urged—and urged with plausibility—that it is true to nature; it is true, that is, that women of genius—and, indeed, other women—do not

always show that taste in the selection of lovers which commends itself to the masculine mind. There is nothing contrary to experience in the supposition that the imagination of an impulsive girl may transfigure a very second-rate young tradesman into a lover worthy of her; but this does not excuse the author for sharing the illusion. It is painfully true that some women, otherwise excellent, may be tempted, like Janet Dempster, to take to stimulants. But we should not have been satisfied if her weakness had been represented as a creditable or venial peculiarity, or without a sense of the degradation. So it would, in any case, be hardly pleasant to make our charming Maggie the means of illustrating the doctrine that a woman of high qualities may throw herself away upon a low creature; when she is made to act in this way, and the weakness is not duly emphasised, we are forced to suppose that George Eliot did not see what a poor creature she has really drawn. Perhaps this is characteristic of a certain feminine incapacity for drawing really masculine heroes, which is exemplified, not quite so disagreeably, in the case of Dorothea and Ladislaw. But it is a misfortune, and all the more so because the error seems to be gratuitous. If it was necessary to introduce a new lover, he should have been endowed with some qualities likely to attract Maggie's higher nature, instead of betraying his second-rate dandyism in every feature. But the engagement to Philip Wakem, who is, at least, a lovable character, might surely have supplied enough tragical motive for a catastrophe which would not degrade poor Maggie to common clay. As it is, what promises to be the most perfect story of its kind ends most pathetically indeed, but yet with a strain which jars most painfully upon the general harmony.

The line so sharply drawn in the "Mill on the Floss" is also the boundary between two provinces of the whole region. With Maggie's visit to St. Ogg's, we take leave of that part of George Eliot's work which can be praised

without important qualification—of work so admirable in its kind that we have a sense of complete achievement. In the later stories we come upon debatable ground; we have to recognise distinct failure in hitting the mark, and to strike a balance between the good and bad qualities, instead of simply recognising the thorough harmony of a finished whole. What is the nature of the change? The short-comings are, as I have said, obvious enough. We have, for example, the growing tendency to substitute elaborate analysis for direct presentation; there are such passages, as one to which I have referred, where we are told that it is necessary to understand Deronda's character at five-and-twenty in order to appreciate the effect of after-events; and where we have an elaborate discussion which would be perfectly admissible in the discussion of some historical character, but which, in a writer who has the privilege of creating history, strikes us as an evasion of a difficulty. When we are limited to certain facts, we are forced to theorise as to the qualities which they indicate. Real people do not always get into situations which speak for themselves. But when we can make such facts as will reveal character, we have no right to give the abstract theory for the concrete embodiment. We perceive when this is done that the reflective faculties have been growing at the expense of the imagination, and that, instead of simply enriching and extending the field of interest, they are coming into the foreground and usurping functions for which they are unfitted. The fault is palpable in "Romola." The remarkable power not only of many passages but of the general conception of the book is unable to blind us to the fact that, after all, it is a magnificent piece of cram. The masses of information have not been fused by a glowing imagination. The fuel has put out the fire. If we fail to perceive this in the more serious passages, it is painfully evident in those which are meant to be humorous or playful. People often impose

upon themselves when they are listening to some rhetoric, perhaps because, when we have got into a reverential frame of mind, our critical instincts are in abeyance. But it is not so easy to simulate amusement. And if anybody, with the mimicry of Mrs. Poyser or Bob Jakin in his mind, can get through the chapter called "A Florentine Joke" without coming to the conclusion that the jokes of that period were oppressive and wearisome ghosts of the facetious, he must be one of those people who take in jokes by the same faculty as scientific theorems. If we are indulgent, it must be on the ground that the historical novel proper is after all an elaborate blunder. It is really analogous to, and shows the weakness of, the various attempts at the revival of extinct phases of art with which we have been overpowered in these days. It almost inevitably falls into Scylla or Charybdis; it is either a heavy mass of information striving to be lively, or it is really lively at the price of being thoroughly shallow, and giving us the merely pretty and picturesque in place of the really impressive. If anyone has succeeded in avoiding the horns of this dilemma, it is certainly not George Eliot. She had certainly very imposing authorities on her side; but I imagine that "Romola" gives unqualified satisfaction only to people who hold that academical correctness of design can supply the place of vivid directness of intuitive vision.

Yet the situation was not so much the cause as the symptom of a change. When George Eliot returned to her proper ground, she did not regain the old magic. "Middlemarch" is undoubtedly a powerful book, but to many readers it is a rather painful book, and it can hardly be called a charming book to anyone. The light of common day has most unmistakably superseded the indescribable glow which illuminated the earlier writings.

The change, so far as we need consider it, is sufficiently indicated by one circumstance. The "prelude" invites us

to remember Saint Theresa. Her passionate nature, we are told, demanded a consecration of life to some object of unselfish devotion. She found it in the reform of a religious order. But there are many modern Theresas who, with equally noble aspirations, can find no worthy object for their energies. They have found "no coherent social faith and order," no sufficient guidance for their ardent souls. And thus we have now and then a Saint Theresa, "foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances instead of centring in some long recognisable deed." This, then, is the keynote of "Middlemarch." We are to have one more variation on the theme already treated in various form; and Dorothea Brooke is to be the Saint Theresa with lofty aspirations to pass through a searching ordeal, and, if she fails in outward results, yet to win additional nobility from failure. And yet, if this be the design, it almost seems as if the book were intended for elaborate irony. Dorothea starts with some admirable, though not very novel, aspirations of the social kind with a desire to improve drainage and provide better cottages for the poor. She meets a consummate pedant, who is piteously ridiculed for his petty and hidebound intellect, and immediately takes him to be her hero and guide to lofty endeavour. She fancies, as we are told, that her spiritual difficulties will be solved by the help of a little Latin and Greek. "Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary—at least the alphabet and a few roots—in order to arrive at the core of things and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian." She marries Mr. Casaubon, and of course is speedily undeceived. But curiously enough, the process of enlightenment seems to be very partial. Her faith in her husband receives its death-blow as soon as she finds out—not that he is a wretched pedant, but that he is a pedant of the wrong kind. Will Ladislaw points out to her that Mr. Casaubon is throwing away his

labour because he does not know German, and is therefore only abreast of poor old Jacob Bryant in the last century, instead of being a worthy contemporary of Professor Max Müller. Surely Dorothea's error is almost as deep as ever. Casaubon is a wretched being because he has neither heart nor brains—not because his reading has been confined to the wrong set of books. Surely a man may be a prig and a pedant, though he is familiar with the very last researches of German professors. The latest theories about comparative mythology may be familiar to a man with a soul comparable only to a dry pea in a bladder. If Casaubon had been all that Dorothea fancied, if his knowledge had been thoroughly up to the mark, we should still have pitied her for her not knowing the difference between a man and a stick. Unluckily, she never seems to find out that in this stupendous blunder, and not in the pardonable ignorance as to the true value of his literary labours, is the real source of her misfortune. In fact, she hardly seems to grow wiser even at the end; for when poor Casaubon is as dead as his writings, she takes up with a young gentleman who appears to have some good feeling, but is conspicuously unworthy of the affections of a Saint Theresa. Had "Middlemarch" been intended for a cutting satire upon the aspirations of young ladies who wish to learn Latin and Greek when they ought to be nursing babies and supporting hospitals, these developments of affairs would have been in perfect congruity with the design. As it is, we are left with the feeling that aspirations of this kind scarcely deserve a better fate than they meet, and that Dorothea was all the better for getting the romantic aspirations out of her head. Have not the commonplace people the best of the argument?

It would be very untrue to say that the later books show any defect of general power. I do not think, for example, that there are many passages in modern fiction so

vigorous as the description of poor Lydgate, whose higher aspirations are dashed with a comparatively vulgar desire for worldly success, gradually engulfed by the selfish persistence of his wife, like a swimmer sucked down by an octopus. On the contrary, the picture is so forcible and so lifelike that one reads it with a sense of actual bitterness. And as in "Daniel Deronda," though I am ready to confess that Mordecai and Daniel are to my mind intolerable bores, I hold the story of Grandecourt and Gwendolen to be, though not a pleasant, a singularly powerful study. And it may certainly be said both of "Romola" and of "Middlemarch" that they have some merits of so high an order that the defects upon which I have dwelt are felt as blemishes, not as fatal errors. If there is some misunderstanding of the limits of her own powers, or some misconception of true artistic conditions, nobody can read them without the sense of having been in contact with a comprehensive and vigorous intellect, with high feeling and keen powers of observation. Only one cannot help regretting the loss of that early charm. In reading "Adam Bede," we feel first the magic, and afterwards we recognise the power which it implies. In "Middlemarch" we feel the power, but we ask in vain for the charm. Some such change passes over any great mind which goes through a genuine process of development. It is not surprising that the reflective powers should become more predominant in later years; that reasoning should to some extent take the place of intuitive perception; and that experience of life should give a sterner and sadder tone to the implied criticism of human nature. We are prepared to find less spontaneity, less freshness of interest in the little incidents of life, and we are not surprised that a mind so reflective and richly stored should try to get beyond the charmed circle of its early successes and to give us a picture of wider and less picturesque aspects of human life. But this does not

seem to account sufficiently for the presence of something jarring and depressing in the later work.

Without going into the question fully, one thing may be said: the modern Theresa, whether she is called Dorothea, or Maggie, or Dinah, or Janet, is the central figure in the world of George Eliot's imagination. We are to be brought to sympathise with the noble aspirations of a loving and unselfish spirit, conscious that it cannot receive any full satisfaction within the commonplace conditions of this prosaic world. How women are to find a worthier sphere of action than the mere suckling of babes and chronicling of small beer is a question for the Social Science Associations. Some people answer it by proposing to give women votes or degrees, and others would tell us that such problems can only be answered by reverting to Saint Theresa's method. The solution in terms of actual conduct lies beyond the proper province of the novelist. She has done all that she can do if she has revealed the intrinsic beauty of such a character, and its proper function in life. She should make us fall in love with Romola and Maggie, and convert us to the belief that they are the true salt of the earth.

Up to a certain point her success is complete, and it is won by high moral feeling and quick sympathy with true nobility of character. We pay willing homage to these pure and lofty feminine types, and we may get some measure of the success by comparing them with other dissatisfied heroines whose aspirations are by no means so lofty or so compatible with delicate moral sentiment. But the triumph has its limits. In the sweet old-world country life a Janet or a Dinah can find some sort of satisfaction from an evangelical preacher, or within the limits of the Methodist church. If the thoughts and ways of her circle are narrow, it is in harmony with itself, and we may feel its beauty without asking awkward questions. But as soon as Maggie has left her quiet fields

and reached even such a centre of civilisation as St. Ogg's, there is a jar and a discord. "Romola" is in presence of a great spiritual disturbance where the highest aspirations are doomed to the saddest failure; and when we get to "Middlemarch" we feel that the charm has somehow vanished. Even in the early period, Mrs. Poyser's bright common-sense has some advantages over Dinah Morris's high-wrought sentiment. And in "Middlemarch" we feel more decidedly that high aspirations are doubtful qualifications; that the ambitious young devotee of science has to compound with the quarrelling world, and the brilliant young Dorothea to submit to a decided clipping of her wings. Is it worth while to have a lofty nature in such surroundings? The very bitterness with which the triumph of the lower characters is set forth seems to betray a kind of misgiving. And it is the presence of this feeling, as well as the absence of the old picturesque scenery, that gives a tone of melancholy to the later books. Some readers are disposed to sneer, and to look upon the heroes and heroines as male and female prigs, who are ridiculous if they persist and contemptible when they fail. Others are disposed to infer that the philosophy which they represent is radically unsatisfactory. And some may say that, after all, the picture is true, however sad, and that, in all ages, people who try to lift their heads above the crowd must lay their account with martyrdom and be content to be uncomfortable. The moral, accepted by George Eliot herself, is indicated at the end of "Middlemarch." A new Theresa, she tells us, will not have the old opportunity any more than a new Antigone would "spend heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's funeral; the medium in which these ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone." There will be many Dorotheas, and some of them doomed to worse sacrifices than the Dorothea of "Middlemarch," and we must be content to think that her influence spent

itself through many invisible channels, but was not the less potent because unseen.

Perhaps that is not a very satisfactory conclusion. I cannot here ask why it should not have been more satisfactory. We must admit that there is something rather depressing in the thought of these anonymous Dorotheas feeling about vaguely for some worthy outlet of their energies, taking up with a man of science and discovering him to be an effete pedant, wishing ardently to reform the world, but quite unable to specify the steps to be taken, and condescending to put up with a very commonplace life in a vague hope that somehow or other they will do some good. Undoubtedly we must admit that, wherever the fault lies, our Theresas have some difficulty in fully manifesting their excellence. But with all their faults, we feel that they embody the imperfect influence of a nature so lofty in its sentiment, so wide in its sympathies, and so keen in its perceptions, that we may wait long before it will be adequately replaced. The imperfections belong in great measure to a time of vast revolutions in thought which produce artistic discords as well as philosophic anarchy. Lower minds escape the difficulty because they are lower; and even to be fully sensitive to the deepest searchings of heart of the time is to possess a high claim on our respect. At lowest, however we may differ from George Eliot's teaching on many points, we feel her to be one who, in the midst of great perplexities, has brought great intellectual powers to setting before us a lofty moral ideal, and, in spite of manifest shortcomings, has shown certain aspects of a vanishing social phase with a power and delicacy unsurpassed in her own sphere.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Nobody ever wrote a dull autobiography. If one may make such a bull, the very dulness would be interesting. The autobiographer has *ex officio* two qualifications of supreme importance in all literary work. He is writing about a topic in which he is keenly interested, and about a topic upon which he is the highest living authority. It may be reckoned, too, as a special felicity that an autobiography, alone of all books, may be more valuable in proportion to the amount of misrepresentation which it contains. We do not wonder when a man gives a false character to his neighbour, but it is always curious to see how a man contrives to present a false testimonial to himself. It is pleasant to be admitted behind the scenes and trace the growth of that singular phantom which, like the Spectre of the Brocken, is the man's own shadow cast upon the coloured and distorting mists of memory. Autobiography for these reasons is so generally interesting, that I have frequently thought with the admirable Benvenuto Cellini that it should be considered as a duty by all eminent men; and, indeed, by men not eminent. As every sensible man is exhorted to make his will, he should also be bound to leave to his descendants some account of his experience of life. The dullest of us would in spite of themselves say something profoundly interesting, if only by explaining how they came to be so dull—a circumstance which is sometimes in great need of explanation. On reflection, however, we must admit that

autobiography done under compulsion would be in danger of losing the essential charm of spontaneity. The true autobiography is written by one who feels an irresistible longing for confidential expansion; who is forced by his innate constitution to unbosom himself to the public of the kind of matter generally reserved for our closest intimacy. Confessions dictated by a sense of duty, like many records of religious experience, have rarely the peculiar attractiveness of those which are prompted by the simple longing for human sympathy. Nothing, indeed, in all literature is more impressive than some of the writings in which great men have laid bare to us the working of their souls in the severest spiritual crisis. But the solemnity and the loftiness of purpose generally remove such work to a rather different category. Augustine's "Confessions" is an impassioned meditation upon great religious and philosophical questions which only condescends at intervals to autobiographical detail. Few books, to descend a little in the scale, are more interesting, whether to the fellow-believer or to the psychological observer, than Bunyan's "Grace Abounding." We follow this real pilgrim through a labyrinth of strange scruples invented by a quick brain placed for the time at the service of a self-torturing impulse, and peopled by the phantoms created by a poetical imagination under stress of profound excitement. Incidentally we learn to know and to love the writer, and certainly not the less because the spiritual fermentation reveals no morbid affectation. We give him credit for exposing the trial and the victory simply and solely for the reason which he alleges; that is to say, because he really thinks that his experience offers useful lessons to his fellow-creatures. He is no attitudiniser, proud at the bottom of his heart of the sensibility which he professes to lament, nor a sanctimonious sentimentalist stimulating a false emotion for purposes of ostentation. He is as simple, honest, and soundhearted as he is tender and

impassioned. But these very merits deprive the book of some autobiographical interest. It never enters his head that anybody will care about John Bunyan the tinker, or the details of his tinkering. He who painted the scenes in Vanity Fair could have drawn a vivid picture of Elstow and Bedford, of Puritanical preachers and Cromwellian soldiers, and the judges and gaolers under Charles II. Here and there, in scattered passages of his works, he gives us graphic anecdotes in passing which set the scene before us vividly as a bit of Pepys's diaries. The incidents connected with his commitment to prison are described with a dramatic force capable of exciting the envy of a practised reporter. But we see only enough to tantalise us with the possibilities. He tells us so little of his early life that his biographers cannot make up their minds as to whether he was, as Southey calls him, a "blackguard," or a few degrees above or below that zero-point of the scale of merit. Lord Macaulay takes it for granted that he was in the Parliamentary, and Mr. Froude thinks it almost proved that he was in the Royalist army. He tells us nothing of the death of the first wife, whose love seems to have raised him from blackguardism; nor of his marriage to the second wife, who stood up for him so bravely before the judges, and was his faithful companion to the end of his pilgrimage. The book is therefore a profoundly interesting account of one phase in the development of the character of our great prose-poet; but hardly an autobiography. The narrative was worth writing, because his own heart, like his allegorical Mansoul, had been the scene of one incident in the everlasting struggle between the powers of light and darkness, not because the scene had any independent interest of its own.

In this one may be disposed to say Bunyan judged rightly. The wisest man, it is said, is he who realises most clearly the narrow limits of human knowledge; the greatest should be penetrated with the strongest conviction

of his own insignificance. The higher we rise above the average mass of mankind, the more clearly we should see our own incapacity for acting the part of Providence. The village squire who does not really believe in anything invisible from his own steeple, may fancy that he is of real importance to the world, for the world for him means his village. "P.P. clerk of this parish" thought that all future generations would be interested in the fact that he had smoothed the dog's ears in the great Bible. A genuine statesman who knows something of the forces by which the world is governed should have seen through the humbug of history. He should have learnt the fable of the fly and the chariot wheel, and be aware that what are called his achievements are really the events upon which, through some accident of position, he has been allowed to inscribe his name. One stage in a nation's life gets itself labelled Cromwell, and another William Pitt; but perhaps Pitt and Cromwell were really of little more importance than some contemporary P.P. This doctrine, however, is considered, I know not why, to be immoral, and to smack of fatalism, cynicism, jealousy of great men, and other objectionable tendencies. We are in a tacit conspiracy to flatter conspicuous men at the expense of their fellow-workers, and he is the most generous and appreciative who can heap the greatest number of superlatives upon growing reputations, and add a stone to the gigantic pile of eulogy under which the historical proportions of some great figures are pretty well buried. We must not complain, therefore, if we flatter the vanity which seems to be the most essential ingredient in the composition of a model biographer. A man who expects that future generations will be profoundly interested in the state of his interior seems to be drawing a heavy bill upon posterity. And yet it is generally honoured. We are flattered perhaps by this exhibition of confidence. We are touched by the demand for sympathy. There is

something pathetic in this belief that we shall be moved by the record of past sufferings and aspirations as there is in a child's confidence that you will enter into its little fears and hopes. And perhaps vanity is so universal a weakness, and, in spite of good moralising, it so strongly resembles a virtue in some of its embodiments, that we cannot find it in our hearts to be angry with it. We can understand it too thoroughly. And then we make an ingenious compromise with our consciences. Our interest in Pepys's avowals of his own foibles, for example, is partly due to the fact that whilst we are secretly conscious of at least the germs of similar failings, the consciousness does not bring any sense of shame, because we set down the confession to the account of poor Pepys himself. The man who, like Goldsmith, is so running over with jealousy that he is forced to avow it openly, seems to be a sort of excuse to us for cherishing a less abundant stock of similar sentiment. This is one occult source of pleasure in reading autobiography. We have a delicate shade of conscious superiority in listening to the vicarious confession. "I am sometimes troubled," said Boswell, "by a disposition to stinginess." "So am I," replied Johnson, "but I do not tell it." That is our attitude in regard to the autobiographer. After all, we say to ourselves, this distinguished person is such a one as we are; and even more so, for he cannot keep it to himself. The conclusion is not quite fair, it may be, when applied to the case of a diarist like Pepys, who, poor man, meant only to confide his thoughts to his note-books. But it applies more or less to every genuine autobiographer—to every man, that is, who has deliberately written down a history of his own feelings and thoughts for the benefit of posterity.

The prince of all autobiographers in this full sense of the word—the man who represents the genuine type in its fullest realisation—is undoubtedly Rousseau. The "Confessions" may certainly be regarded as not only

one of the most remarkable, but as in parts one of the most repulsive, books ever written. Yet, one must add, it is also one of the most fascinating. Rousseau starts by declaring that he is undertaking a task which has had no precedent, and will have no imitators—the task of showing a man in all the truth of nature, and that man himself. How far he is perfectly sincere in this, or in the declaration which immediately follows, that no one of his readers will be able to pronounce himself a better man that Jean Jacques Rousseau, is a question hardly to be answered. The avowal is at any rate characteristic of the true autobiographer. It reflects the subtle vanity which, taking now the guise of perfect sincerity, and now that of deep humility, encourages us to colour as highly as possible both our vices and our virtues as equally entitling us to the sympathies of mankind: that strange and Protean sensibility which we are puzzled to classify either as an excessive craving for admiration, or a mere morbid desire for self-abasement. Certainly in Rousseau it sometimes shows itself in a shamelessness which it is very hard to forgive unless we will admit the ambiguous and well-worn plea of partial insanity. The pleasure—always, it must be granted, a very questionable one—of recognising our own failings in our superiors, passes too often into sheer disgust or shuddering horror at the spectacle of genius grovelling in the mire. But Rousseau represents an abnormal development of all the qualities of his class; and this, the ugliest amongst the autobiographic instincts, is hardly developed out of proportion to the rest. And, therefore, if we cannot quite forgive, we are not altogether alienated. We read, for example, one of those amazing confessions of contemptible meanness which makes us wonder that human fingers could commit them to paper: the story of his casting the blame of a petty theft upon an innocent girl, to her probable ruin; of his desertion of his friend

lying in a fit on the pavement of a strange town; of the more grievous crime of his abandonment of his own children to the foundling hospital. How can any interest survive in the narrator except that kind of interest which a physiologist takes in some ghastly disease? It would be a libel upon ourselves to suppose that we see the reflections of our own hearts in such narratives, or that we can in any degree take them as an indirect flattery to our own superiority. Such an emotion may conceivably be present in some other passages. When, for example, we read how, on the death of a dear friend, Rousseau confesses to one who loved them both that he derived some pleasure from the reflection that he should inherit an excellent black coat, he may perhaps be giving to us the sort of satisfaction which we derive from a keen maxim of Rochefoucauld. We recognise the truth—painful though it may be in itself—that some strand of mean and selfish feeling may be interwoven with genuine regret; and we may reconcile ourselves by interpreting it as a proof that some of the sentiments for which we have blushed are not inconsistent with real kindness of heart. We may smile still more harmlessly at the quaint avowal of absurdity when Rousseau decides that he will test the probability of his future fate by throwing a stone at a tree trunk. A hit is to mean salvation, and a miss, damnation. He chooses a very big trunk very close to him, succeeds in hitting it, and sets his mind at rest. We may congratulate ourselves without malice on this proof that men of genius may indulge in very grotesque follies. A student of human nature may be grateful for a frank avowal now and then of the "fears of the brave and follies of the wise." But how can we justify ourselves in point of taste—to say nothing of morality—at not shrinking back from the more hideous avowals of downright depravity contained in this strange record

which is to convince us that none amongst the sons of men can claim superiority to Rousseau?

The answer is not far to seek. One leading peculiarity of Rousseau, the great prophet of sentimentalism, is that exaltation of the immediate sensation at the expense of hard realities which is the mark of all sentimentalism. He can enjoy intensely, but cannot restrain a single impulse with a view to future enjoyment. He can sympathise keenly with immediate sufferings, but shrinks from admitting that indulgence may be the worst cruelty. His only rule of life is to give free play to his impulses. All discipline is tyranny. Education is to consist in stimulating the emotions at the expense of the reason. And, therefore, facts in general are on the whole objectionable and inconvenient things. Your practical man is merely a wheel in a gigantic machinery, for ever grinding out barren results and never leaving himself time for the pure happiness of feeling. He would abolish space and time to make one dreamer happy. Dreamland is the only true reality. There facts conform to feeling instead of crushing it out of existence. There we can be optimists; see virtue rewarded, simplicity honoured, genius appreciated, and the substance of happiness pursued instead of its idle shadows—external show, and hard-won triumphs that pall in the fruition. Nothing is more characteristic of this tendency than the passage in which he describes the composition of the "Nouvelle Héloïse." The impossibility, he says, of grasping realities cast him into the land of chimeras; seeing nothing in existence which was worthy of his delirium, he nourished it in an ideal world which his creative imagination soon peopled with beings after his own heart. He was in love—not with an external object, but with love itself; he formed out of his passionate longings those beautiful, unreal, highstrung beings, whose ecstasies and agonies kept fine ladies sitting up all night in forgetfulness of

balls and assemblies, and which now, alas! have faded, as unreal things are apt to fade, and become rather wearisome and slightly absurd. Facts revenge themselves upon the man who denies their existence; and poor Rousseau did not escape the inevitable Nemesis. His follies and his crimes sprang from this fatal habit of sacrificing everything to the immediate impulse; his reveries seduced him into the region of downright illusions; and his optimism—by a curious, but not uncommon inversion—became the strongest proof of his actual misery. He found realities so painful that he swore that they must be dreams; as dreams were so sweet, that they must be the true realities. "All men are born free," as he says in his famous sentence; "and men are everywhere in chains." That is the true Rousseau logic. Everything must be right in some transcendental sense, because in an actual sense everything is wrong. We say that men take a cheerful or a doleful view of the universe according to the state of their own livers; but sometimes the reverse seems to hold good. It requires, it would seem, unusual buoyancy of spirits to endure the thought that the world is a scene of misery; and the belief in its happiness is sometimes the attempt of the miserable man to reconcile himself to his lot. Anyhow, Rousseau had learnt this dangerous lesson. He suffered from a morbid appetite for happiness; his intense longing for enjoyment stimulated an effeminate shrinking from the possibility of the crumpled rose-leaf. He identified himself with the man who left his mistress in order to write letters to her. The absent—in this sense—have no blemishes. And this is true of the past as of the distant. Foresight, he says, always spoilt his enjoyment; the future is pure loss to him; for to look forward is always to anticipate possibilities of evil. He lives entirely, as he says elsewhere, in the present; but in a present which includes the enjoyment of the past

pleasures. "Not heaven itself upon the past has power," and we can nowhere be absolutely safe except in brooding over the moments of happiness which have survived by reason of their pleasantness.

This is part of the charm of the "Confessions." Finding no pure enjoyment in the present, he says, he returned by fits to the serene days of his youth. He chewed the cud of past delight, and lived again his life at the Charmettes. Hence sprang the "Nouvelle Héloïse," placed amongst the scenery of his early youth and constantly reviving real experiences. He apologises for giving us the details of his youth; but the apology is clearly needless. He gives what he delights in. His youthful memories grow brighter as the latter become effaced; the least facts of that time please him, because they are of that time. He remembers the place, the people, the time; the servant moving in the room, the swallow entering the window, the fly settling on his hand whilst he writes his lesson; he trembles with pleasure as he recalls the minutest details—and we feel the reflection of his delight. Indeed, this is one secret of most autobiography. There is something touching in those introductory fragments which are so common in autobiographies. The old man, we see, has been enticed to write a book by the charm of the first chapter. He tells us with eager interest the story of his early days; he remembers the village school and his initiation into the alphabet, or calls up the sacred vision of the mother whose figure still stands out amidst the mists of memory; but as he reaches the point where the light of common day blends with the romantic colouring of childhood, his hands fails, and he sums up the remainder of his history, if he has the courage to continue, in a few barren facts and dates. The phenomenon recurs again and again and leaves us to infer, according to our tastes, that infancy is the time of real happiness, or that the appearance of happiness always belongs to the distant.

Rousseau tries to explain it in his own case. He long remained a child, he says; objects always made less impression upon him than their memories; and as all his ideas were images, the first engraved were the deepest, and the later rather blended with them than effaced them.

To explain Rousseau's power over his generation, and even his strongest interest for us, we should require to add other considerations. Rousseau's dreams, in fact, were not those of the mystic or of the poetical philosopher. If he cared, in one sense, very little for facts, it was because the past and the present overpowered the future. He could not cut himself apart from the world, as some meditative minds have done who live by choice in the region of abstract speculation. His temperament was too sensuous, his sympathies with those around him too keen, to permit him to find a permanent refuge in the gorgeous but unsubstantial world of poetic imagery. His senses bound him fast to realities as upon a rock on which he was always struggling impatiently and spasmodically. It is in the vicissitudes of this struggle that the interest of his personal story consists. For it leads him to find that solution which has been preached in one form or other by so many moralists in all ages, and which had a special meaning for the society of his day. Ancient philosophers said that the great secret of life is in placing your happiness in things which depend upon ourselves, and not in things which are at the mercy of circumstance. Happiness, says a modern prophet, is to be found by lessening your denominator, not by increasing your numerator; by restricting your wants, not by multiplying your enjoyments. The great illusion of life is the childish fancy that you can get the moon by crying for it, instead of learning that the moon is beyond your reach. You must learn the great secret of renunciation. Rousseau's version of this doctrine was given with an intensity of conviction which moved the hearts of his contemporaries; and the

"Confessions" are a kind of continuous comment upon the text. Are we, it may be asked, to take the ascetic view—to admit that happiness is impossible in this life, and to seek future blessedness by mortifying the affections which seek for present gratification? No, Rousseau would say; happiness is everything; to get as much enjoyment out of life as we possibly can is the one conceivable end of a human being. Nobody could be a more thorough hedonist. Then, should we seek for happiness in active life devoted to some absorbing ambition, or rather in courting those lofty emotions or those intellectual tastes which are the fruit of a thorough cultivation of our faculties? No, again; for active life means weariness and disappointment, and exchange of substance for vain shadows; and the more men are cultivated, the more sophisticated and unreal become their lives, and the less their real powers of enjoyment. Then, should we be Epicureans of the vulgar type, and give ourselves up to the indulgence of animal appetites? That, again, though Rousseau sometimes falls into perilous approximation to that error in practice, is as far as possible from his better mind. Nobody, in fact—and it is the redeeming quality in his life—could set a higher value upon the simple affections. A life of calm domestic tranquillity—the idyllic life of unsophisticated country villages, of regular labour, and innocent recreation—is the ideal which he set before his generation with all the fervour of his eloquence. That he made a terrible mess of it himself is undeniable; it is equally undeniable that the praises of domestic life come with a very bad grace from the man who sanctioned the worst practices of a corrupt society by abandoning his own children, though he tries to represent even that amazing delinquency as a corollary from his principles; and it must also be admitted that his Arcadia has too often the taint of sentimental unreality. But the doctrine takes a worthier form, not only in those passages of his speculative writings which manifest his deep

sympathy with the poor and simple crushed under an effete system of social tyranny, but in the many passages of the "Confessions" where he recalls his brief approximations to a realisation of his dreams. He might claim to have found "love in huts where poor men lie;" and to have been qualified by experience for recognising the surpassing beauty of simple happiness. That is the secret charm of those eloquent passages to which the jaded fine ladies and gentlemen of his days turned again and again with an enthusiastic sympathy which it would be grossly unjust to set down as mere affectation. Such, for example, is his description of the delicious strolls by his beloved Lake of Geneva, where every scene was redolent of youthful associations; where he seemed to be almost within reach of that sweet tranquil life which was yet for him but a vanishing mirage; and where alone he declares that he might obtain perfect happiness, if he had but a faithful friend, a loving wife, a cow, and a little boat. He smiles sadly enough at the simplicity which has frequently led him to that region in search of this imaginary bliss, and at the contrast between the dream and the reality. Even in Paris he could grasp a like phantom. Here with his half-idiotic Theresa (who had, however, the heart of an angel), he found perfect happiness for a time. He pictures himself sitting at the open window, the sill forming his table, for a frugal supper; looking down upon the street from the fourth story, and enjoying a crust of bread, a few cherries, a bit of cheese, and a bottle of wine. Who, he exclaims, can feel the happiness of these feasts? Friendship, confidence, intimacy, gentleness of soul, how sweet is the seasoning you bring! And, of course, he soon passes to a confession proving that his paradise had its snake. But the better sentiment, though clogged and degraded by ignoble passions, almost reconciles us to the man. Rousseau represents the strange combination of a kind of sensual appetite for pure and simple pleasures. On

one side he reminds us of Keats, by his intense appreciation of sensuous beauty; and, on the other, of Cowper, by his love of such simple pleasures as our English poet enjoyed when sitting at Mrs. Unwin's tea-urn. It is a strange, almost a contradictory mixture; but Rousseau's life is a struggle between antagonisms; and until you admit that human nature is in some sense a contradictory compound, and can take delight in the queer results which grow out of them, you are hardly qualified to be a student of autobiography. Your proper biographer glides over these difficulties, or tries to find some reconciliation. The man who tells his own story reveals them because he is unconscious of their mixture.

Rousseau, I said, was the type of all autobiographers; and for the obvious reason, that no man ever turned himself inside out for the inspection of posterity so completely, and that even when he was unconscious of the exposure. Even his affectations are instructive. But when we think of some other autobiographers we may be inclined to retract. There are, when one comes to reflect, more ways of killing a cat than choking her with cream: and there are more ways of revealing your character than by this deliberate introspection, this brooding over past feelings, and laying bare every impulse of your nature. So, if Rousseau is to be called the typical autobiographer, it is perhaps in virtue simply of those strange contradictions which give piquancy to his "Confessions," and to those of many other men to whom the great problem of existence presented itself in different terms. So for example, it would be difficult to imagine a more complete antithesis to Rousseau than we find in Benvenuto Cellini, whose autobiography is almost equally interesting in a totally different way. He is a man in whose company the very conception of sentimentalism seems to be an absurdity; who is so incapable of reflective brooding that he is just as proud of his worst crimes as of his greatest

artistic achievements; who tells with equal glee how he struck his dagger into the nape of his enemy's neck, and made a gold button of unparalleled beauty for the Pope's cope; who is so full of energy that his life seems to be one desperate struggle, and who is most at home in the periods of most overpowering excitement, whether firing guns at the siege of Rome, or pitching all his plate into the furnace to help the fusing of the statue of Perseus; so full of intense vitality that when we read his memoirs it becomes difficult to realise the fact that all these throbbing passions and ambitions are still for ever, and that we peaceable readers are alive; at once a man of high artistic genius, and yet such a braggart and a liar as to surpass Bobadil or the proverbial Ferdinand Mendez Pinto; a standing refutation of that pleasant moral commonplace which tries to associate genius with modesty; a queer compound of reckless audacity and defiance of all constituted authority with abject superstition; a man, in short, who makes us wonder, as we read, whether the world has advanced or gone back; whether we have gained or lost by substituting the douce, respectable jeweller, and the vulgar blackguard of modern London, for this magnificent goldsmith bravo of the Florence of the sixteenth century. The only writer in our own literature who, at a long interval, recalls this brilliant apparition, is Lord Herbert of Cherbury. In him, too, we find the singular combination of the fire-eating duellist with the man of high intellectual power. Horace Walpole, who procured the publication of his autobiography, says that the reader will be astonished to find that the "history of Don Quixote was the life of Plato." Herbert, it is true, was not quite a Plato nor a Quixote. His thirst for chivalrous adventures may indeed remind us of the Don or of Cellini; yet somehow, though he wandered through Europe in true knight-errant spirit, always on the look-out for occasions of proving that

courage for which, so he declares, he had as high a reputation as any man of his time, and was as irritable, punctilious, and given to dare-devil deeds as the most precise of cavaliers could desire, he seems to have had singular ill-luck. Somehow, the authorities always interpose to prevent his fighting. The vanity of Lord Herbert is of a more reflective and priggish type than that of Cellini. Instead of taking himself for granted, with the superlative audacity of his predecessor, he contemplates his own perfections complacently, and draws his own portrait for the benefit of his descendants, as an embodiment of the perfect gentleman accomplished in all knightly arts, and full to overflowing of the most becoming sentiments. He has, in fact, a rather obtrusive moral sense, whereas an entire absence of any incumbrance of that kind is one of Cellini's peculiarities; or, at least, the Italian assumes that whatever he does must be right, whereas the Englishman is simply convinced that he does whatever is right. Herbert parades himself as a model with an amazing consciousness of his own perfection, and sets forth his various natural endowments—such, for example, as the delicious odour which exudes from his body and perfumes even his clothes—as a kind of providential testimony to his merits. When a voice from heaven orders him to publish his great book "De Veritate," we feel that no human *imprimatur* would be adequate to so important an occasion. And, in spite of his swelling self-satisfaction, we must admit that he has real claims upon our respect; in fact, Herbert, though not so great a poet as his brother George, at least wrote one poem which has a curious interest as anticipating, not only the metre, but, in some degree, the sentiment, of "In Memoriam;" and, though less conspicuous as a philosopher than Bacon or Hobbes, wrote books in which it is possible to trace some remarkable analogies to the teaching of Kant. When Walpole and Gray first tried

to read the life they could not get on for "laughing and screaming," and Walpole was rather vexed when people took Herbert a little too seriously, and were inclined to admire him as a worthy successor to Sir Philip Sidney. Yet Herbert is but one of many proofs (perhaps Walpole himself was another) that all coxcombs are not fools.

We have, it is plain, got a long way from Rousseau. We are almost, it may be said, at the very opposite pole of character. If vanity be a determining force in both cases, it is in the two cases controlled and directed by opposite passions. Combined with a morbid tendency to retrospection, a weak self-pity, an effeminate shrinking from pain, it reveals itself as a perverse pleasure in baring to public gaze those viler impulses which most men shrink from revealing to themselves. In the masterful, overbearing, active character, it appears in the more natural shape of straightforward ostentation, though it sometimes leads to the same end; for it displays follies and vices, not because they are shameful, but for the opposite reason that it sees nothing in them to be ashamed of. Whether it should be called by the same name, as manifested in the one or in the other combination, is a question for the unlucky psychologist who has already a sufficient burden of insoluble problems. And we might find new puzzles in abundance for the same person by tracing the manifold transformations of the same Protean quality. We might skip from the Quixote-Plato—rather, one might say, the Bobadil-Kant—to another biographer, like him in little but the power of amusing, the vivacious Colley Cibber. Cibber's vanity is of a simpler type. It seems to be an unaccountable freak of nature than Cibber should have been the descendant of a Schleswig-Holstein father and an English mother. We could have sworn that he was a born Frenchman. His vanity is that which we generally attribute to the race whom we used to call our "lively neighbours." In other words, instead of being

priggish or sulky like the English, it is closely allied to good sense, good humour, and simplicity. It implies unfeigned self-complacency quite unalloyed by self-deception. It supplied the excellent Colley with an armour of proof which made him absolutely impervious even to the most vicious stings of Pope's poisonous satire. He took all ridicule with the most imperturbable good temper, because he fully recognised, and was perfectly reconciled to the fact that he was ridiculous. He writes his life, as he tells us with admirable serenity, because he was vain, and liked to talk about himself. What can the critic say more? "Expose me? Why, dear sir, does not every man that writes expose himself? Can you make me more ridiculous than nature has made me?" To hurt such a man by correct portraiture was impossible; and when Pope tried to injure him by giving him the absurdly incorrect name of Dunce, the satirist missed his mark too palpably to hurt anybody but himself. And so, though the laughing-stock of all the wits, assailed by Pope and Fielding, the lucky Cibber, lapped in his invulnerable vanity, went gaily through his eighty-six years of life, as brisk and buoyant to the end as when he had only to go upon the stage with his natural manners to be the ideal representative of the Foppingtons and Easys of his own comedy. If the autobiography be slightly deficient on the side of sentiment, we may console ourselves by admitting that some of the descriptions of the actors of the time would not disgrace Charles Lamb. Would we find another variety of innocent and excessive vanity? Take up the memoirs—unfortunately fragmentary—of one whose long life ran side by side with Cibber's for some eighty-two years, though in oddly different surroundings, —Swift's "wicked Will Whiston," so called because so transparently guileless and well-meaning that even bigots could only smile at his absurdities. In reading him we fancy that we must be studying a new version of the

"Vicar of Wakefield." In truth, however, that good Dr. Primrose was one of Whiston's disciples, and got into trouble, as we may remember, by advocating a crotchet learnt from his predecessor a little too warmly. The master, however, suffered longer than the disciple, and shows just the same innocuous vanity in regard to his own supposed discoveries, and the same simple-minded wonder that others should fail to be converted, or should refuse to sacrifice preferment to crotchets about the date of the Apostolic Constitutions. Whiston's self-complacency reappears with a difference in Baxter's ponderous autobiography. The copious outpourings of the good man help us to understand the report, which he can happily deny, that his multitudinous publications had ruined his bookseller; but it is full of interesting display of character, and nowhere more than in the profound conviction that if he had been able to apply a few more sermons he would have converted Cromwell and his troopers from their rebellious purposes, and the innocent enthusiasm with which he hurls his elaborate syllogisms at the heads of Charles II.'s bishops, believing, poor man, in all good faith that the policy of the Restoration government was to be determined by scholastic argumentation.

If we seek for an excellent contrast we may go to those admirable representatives of the worldly bishop of the now extinct type, Newton or Watson. There is something quite touching in Watson's complaints of an unappreciative world. He had been made a professor of chemistry without having studied the very elements of the science, a professor of divinity without having studied theology before, or taking the trouble to study it afterwards. He was appointed to a bishopric because he was a sound Whig, and passed his life in a delightful country town on the banks of Windermere without ever bothering himself to reside in his Welsh diocese. But the stoppage of his preferment at this point is for him a conclusive

proof that true Christian principles could not meet with their reward in this world. How else account for this scandalous neglect of one who, in addition to all his other merits, had taken great trouble to plant trees, and to make an honourable provision for his children—as well as giving them a sound education? It is a natural corollary that the man whose memoirs are thus a continuous grumble over the absence of preferment should specially pride himself on his thorough self-respect. He belongs, he says, to the oaks, not to the willows. Whenever he asks for a vacant bishopric, he explains that it is only in deference to the wishes of his friends. For himself he asks for nothing better than a life of retirement, though the king and his ministers will be eternally disgraced for having left him to enjoy that blessing. The finest satirist, Fielding or Thackeray, might have been proud of portraying this ingenious and yet transparent self-deception; of unravelling the artifice by which worldliness and preferment hunting are so wrapped in blustering self-assertion as to appear—to the actor himself—as dignified independence of spirit.

Running over such varieties of character, we may ask whether it is fair to set down the autobiographic impulse as in all cases a manifestation of vanity. Or if we call it vanity, must we not stretch the meaning of the word beyond all bearing? The old psychologists used to maintain that every passion was a special form of self-love; and, if we may take such a license, we may call every man vain who takes an interest in his own affairs, and expects that others may be interested. He may hold that opinion even whilst sincerely believing that his success in the game of life was more due to the cards he held than to his intrinsic skill. If that still imply the presence of some latent vanity, some bias to our judgment lying below the region of conscious reflection, it is certainly of a scarcely perceptible kind. Vanity in this

sense is but the inverse side of a man's philosophy of life. It is the value which he sets upon certain qualities of mind and character, which is, no doubt, apt to be more or less connected with the trifling circumstance that he takes them to be his own. But in some cases this latter consideration has so little prominence that we almost overlook it. The autobiography takes so much the form of a philosophical sermon on the true principles of conduct, that we quite forget that the preacher is his own text. He treats himself with apparent impartiality, as if he were merely a scientific specimen whose excellent adaptation to the general scheme of things deserves the notice of an impartial inquirer. It happens to be the case nearest at hand, but is interesting only in the light of the general impersonal principle.

It is curious to trace this in one of the most interesting of modern autobiographies. J. S. Mill begins his recollections by disavowing—with obvious sincerity—any egoistic motive. He wishes to show the effect of a particular mode of education, to trace the influence upon a receptive mind of various currents of modern thought; and, above all, to show how large a debt he owed to certain persons who, but for this avowal, would not receive their due meed of recognition. He is to give a lecture upon his own career as dispassionately as Professor Owen might lecture upon a creature which died in the palæozoic era. In pursuing this end, Mill made more revelations as to his own character than he perhaps knew himself. The book is much else, but it is also an exposition of a definite theory of life. Some readers were astonished to find that, as Mill puts it, a Benthamite might be something more than a mere "reasoning machine." That description, he admits, was applicable in some cases, and even to himself at one period of his life. But nothing could be clearer to readers of the autobiography—as, indeed, it was clear enough to

the observers of his later career—that, so far from being a mere reasoning machine, Mill was a man of strong affections, and even feminine sensibility. And in this, as some critics have said, consists the peculiar pathos of the book. It was the story of a man of strong feelings, who had been put into a kind of moral and logical strait-waistcoat and kept there till it had become a part of himself. The diagnosis of the case showed it, upon this understanding, to be one of partial atrophy of the affections—or rather—for the affections clearly survived—illustrated the effect of depriving them of their natural sustenance. To Mill himself, it was rather a record of the means by which the strait-waistcoat had been forced to yield. Like Bunyan, he had been locked up by Giant Despair, and had escaped from the dungeons, though by a different method. The account of the crisis in his moral development which corresponds to a conversion in the case of Bunyan, gives the real key to his story. He had been put into the strait-waistcoat by that tremendous old gentleman, James Mill, whose force of mind produced less effect through his books than by his personal influence upon his immediate surroundings. His doctrine repelled most readers till it had been made more sympathetic by passing through the more sensitive and emotional nature of his son. The ultimate effect was not to suppress J. S. Mill's affections, but to confine them to certain narrow channels. The primary effect, however, was to produce that "reasoning machine" period in which the son was a simple logic-mill grinding out the materials supplied by the father and Bentham. Now old Mill was not simply a kind of personified "categorical imperative"—a rigid external conscience imposing a fixed rule upon his filial disciple, but his doctrine was certainly a trying one. He held that the sole end of morality was to produce happiness, and at the same time he did not believe in happiness. "He thought human life a poor thing at best after the

freshness of youth and unsatisfied curiosity had gone by." He and his disciples denounced all emotion as "sentimentality," and fully shared that English prejudice which, as J. S. Mill declares, regards feeling, especially if it has a touch of the romantic or exalted, to be something intrinsically disgraceful. Here then was the uncomfortable dilemma into which the younger Mill was driven, and which made him miserable. A rigid sense of duty was the sole rule of life; duty meant the production of happiness; and happiness was a mere illusion and unsubstantial phantom. No wonder if a period followed during which the world seemed to him weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. To feel that all that is left for one is to be a machine grinding out theorems in political economy is certainly not an exhilarating state of things.

The escape from this condition, as Mill represents, involved two discoveries, which, like all such discoveries, are old enough in the state of abstract theory, and new only in so far as they become actual possessions and active principles of conduct. Happiness, he discovered, was to be found by not aiming at happiness; by working for some external end and not meditating upon your own feelings. And, secondly, he discovered the importance of cultivating those sympathies and sentiments which he had previously been inclined to despise as mere incumbrances to his reasoning machinery. But do not the two doctrines clash? Is not an æsthetic cultivation of happiness a name for that introspective brooding of which Rousseau is the great example, implying precisely that thirst for happiness as an ultimate end and aim which his other principles showed to be suicidal? Consciously to cultivate the emotions is to become a sentimentalist—the very thing which he was anxious to renounce. The apparent paradox was solved for him by the help of Wordsworth, who taught him that the charm of tranquil

contemplation might be heightened instead of dulled by a vivid interest in the common feelings and common destinies of human beings; and that æsthetic delight in nature was perfectly compatible with scientific interest in its laws. The famous ode proved to him that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment could be replaced by a wider interest in our fellows; and that the thoughts which gather round the setting sun are not something distinct from, but really identical with, those suggested by a watch over man's mortality. This teaching, he says, dispersed for ever his youthful depression.

The problem seems a simple one when thus stated. How to cultivate your feelings without becoming sentimental? Find your happiness in the happiness of others; and regard even the grinding of that logical mill as work done for the benefit of your kind. Problems, however, which have to be worked out by modifying your own character take a good deal more labour than is implied in putting together a couple of syllogisms. And it is in this modification of character that the peculiar interest of the autobiography consists. The aversion of his mind from his own private interests, the intense devotion of his mental energies to what he regarded as the great needs of his fellow-men, the constant reference of his apparently most abstract speculation to practical reforms, are obvious and most honourable characteristics of Mill as a thinker. One may doubt whether women will be as much improved by receiving votes as he anticipated; one cannot doubt the generosity with which he revolted against their supposed "subjection." But there is another sense in which this theory of the vast importance of "extra-regarding" habits brings out some curious results. We are all such adepts at self-deception that we need not wonder if the very resolution not to think of oneself sometimes tends to a more refined kind of self-consciousness. I have often fancied that nobody

can be so dogmatic as your thoroughly candid person. The fact that he has listened to all sides gives him a kind of right in his own opinion to speak with the authority of a judge. It has been said that a tendency to be "cocksure" is a special characteristic of Mill's school; and perhaps we may recognise it in their master not the less because it is combined with a scrupulous desire to grant a hearing to all antagonists. But another manifestation of character is more interesting. No one could be more anxious than Mill to arrogate nothing to himself. Nobody could state more explicitly that his merit was less in original thought than in willingness to learn from others, and thus that his true function was to mediate between the public and the original thinkers. And therefore it is natural to find him insisting with passionate eagerness upon the superlative merits of the woman who was, according to him, the guide of his mature years, as his father had been of his infancy and youth. Here was the practical commentary on the text of cultivating the emotions. If he withdrew from society and many social enjoyments, it was because his whole emotional strength was concentrated upon a single object. We listen with some mixture of feeling to his rather strained and exalted eulogy. It may be true that Mrs. Mill was more of a poet than Carlyle, and more of a thinker than Mill himself; that she was like Shelley, but that Shelley was but a child to what she ultimately became; that her wisdom was "all but unrivalled," and much more to the same purpose. It may, I say, be true, for one cannot prove a negative in regard to a person of whom the world knows so little. Yet it is a weakness, though an amiable weakness, to attempt, by force of such language, to overcome the inevitable decree of circumstances, and to try to dictate to the world an opinion which it cannot receive upon any single authority. It may be profoundly melancholy that such exalted merit should vanish without leaving more

tangible traces; but it is useless to resent the fact, or to suppose that when such traces are non-existent, the defect can be supplied by the most positive assertions that they might have existed. And Mill would have seen in any other case what was the inevitable suggestion to his readers. He could not, he says, "detect any mixture of errors" in the truths which she struck out far in advance to him. What are the opinions in which a man detects no mixture of error? Plainly his own. But these were far in advance of him? That means that they were deductions from his own. Is it possible, to speak it plainly, to resist a strong impression that these extravagant expressions of admiration may have been lavished upon a living echo—an echo, it is true, skilful enough to anticipate as well as to repeat, but still essentially an echo? We know, for Mill has told us, what he did alone, and we know what he did in co-operation; and if the earlier work was not his best, it certainly contained the whole sum and substance of his later teaching. That his wife must have been a remarkable woman may be a fair deduction from his admiration; that she was all that he then thought her would be, to say the least of it, a very rash conjecture.

Happiness, says Mill, is to be found by aiming at something different from happiness. And if we thus cheat ourselves into happiness, we may attain to the vanity of self-esteem by a similar expedient. By lavishing all our enthusiasm upon one who is but a second self, we may deprive our appreciation of our own merits of its apparent arrogance. This, indeed, is one of the many illusions which give a peculiar interest to the unconscious confessions of autobiographers. But neither is it to be roughly set down as an illusion, and still less as an unworthy sentiment. It in no sort diminishes our interest in discovering that this so-called reasoning machine was a man of the most delicate fibre and most tender affections.

It is easy to forgive the illusions against which a thick cuirass of tough selfishness is the only known safeguard of complete efficacy. Rather it helps to convince us that Mill should be classed in some respects with the unworldly enthusiasts of the Vicar of Wakefield type, whose very simplicity leads them to a harmless vanity which exaggerates their own infallibility and importance to the world. He had the character, though not the crotchets, of the lifelong recluse. Though his intellect was deeply interested in the great problems of contemporary thought, and though he had been for many years in State affairs, there was a wall of separation between himself and his contemporary society. When he came into Parliament he came as re-entering the world from a remote hermitage. Hermits, whether they come from deserts or from the India Office, have a certain tendency to intolerance and contempt for the social part of the species. They have lost some human feeling and preach crusades with a reckless indifference to consequences. I cannot determine how far Mill might be rightly accused of a want of practical sense. But in any case he had nothing of the bitterness or the harsh pedantry of the solitary theorist. Even his enemies could see that his sympathies were fresh and generous, and that his impulses were invariably generous. As a philanthropist, his philanthropy was not of the merciless and inhuman variety. The discovery of the fact was a surprise at the time to those who believed in the traditional Benthamite and Malthusian. The autobiography, with its strange bursts of emotion, perhaps reveals the true secret. If he naturally exaggerated the merits of the partner of his hermitage, he did not necessarily exaggerate her services to him. It is easily credible that her company saved him from ossifying into a mere grinder of formulæ and syllogisms. We shrink a little from certain over-strung phrases, but they reveal to us the pathos of the man's life. Admit that his affection

produced illusion, or that it covered and was combined with a sort of vicarious self-conceit, yet at bottom it represents the intense devotion which springs only out of simplicity and tenderness of nature.

It would be tempting here to draw the obvious parallel between Mill and Carlyle, which must just now be in everyone's mind; for certainly whatever may be said of the "Reminiscences" just published, they contain one of the most remarkable self-revelations ever given to the world, and the relations of the two men to vigorous fathers and passionately adored wives have singular points of contrast and resemblance. But I must be content to close this ramble through some famous autobiographies by touching upon one which often seems to me to be the most delightful of its class. I know, as everybody knows, what may be said against Gibbon: against his want of high enthusiasm, his deficient sympathy with the great causes and their heroes, the provoking self-sufficiency and apparent cold-bloodedness of the fat composed little man. And yet, when reading his autobiography and contrasting it with some of those we have considered, I find myself constantly led to a conclusion not quite in accordance with the proper rules of morality. After all, one cannot help asking, did not Gibbon succeed in solving the problem of life more satisfactorily than almost anybody one knows? Other autobiographies are for the most part records of hard struggles with fate, plaintive lamentations over the inability to obtain any solid satisfaction out of life, appeals of disappointed vanity to the judgment of an indifferent posterity, vain-glorious braggings over successes which should rather have been the cause of shame, weak regrets for the vanishing pleasures of youth and hopeless attempts to make the might-have-been pass muster with the actual achievement. The more a man prides himself upon his successes, the more we feel how good a case a rival's advocate could make on the other side: and when he

laments over his failures, the more we are inclined to say that after all it served him right. But when in imagination we take that famous turn with Gibbon upon that terrace at Lausanne beneath the covered walk of acacias, gaze upon the serene moon and the silent lake, and hear him soliloquise upon the conclusion of the "Decline and Fall," we feel that we are in presence of a man who has a right to his complacency. He has not aimed, perhaps, at the highest mark, but he has hit the bull's-eye. Given his conception of life, he has done his task to perfection. With singular felicity, he has come at the exact moment and found the exact task to give full play to his powers. Nobody had yet laid the keystone in the great arch of history; and he laid it so well that his work can never be superseded. Somebody defines a life to be *une pensée de jeunesse exécutée par l'âge mûr*. It was Gibbon's singular good fortune to illustrate that saying as few men have done. Though his plan ripened slowly and with all deliberation, he acted as if he had foreseen the end from the beginning. If he had been told in his boyhood, You shall live so long a life, with such and such means at your disposal, he could hardly have laid out his life differently. To mistake neither one's power nor one's opportunities is a felicity which happens to few; and Gibbon had the additional good fortune that even his distractions seem to have been useful. The interruption to his Oxford education made him a cosmopolitan; his service with the volunteers helped him to be a military historian; and even his parliamentary career, which threatened to absorb him. only gave to the student the tone of a practical politician. It seems as though everything had been expressly combined to make the best of him.

What more could be desired by a man of Gibbon's temperament? Undoubtedly to be a man of Gibbon's temperament is to have a moderate capacity for certain forms of happiness. In the lives of most great men the

history of a conversion is a record of heart-rending struggle, ending in hard-won peace. Gibbon merely changed his religion as he changed his opinion upon some antiquarian controversy; it is a question as to the weight of historical evidence, like the question about the sixth Æneid, or a dispute about the genealogy of the house of Brunswick. Whatever pangs and raptures may require religious susceptibility were clearly not within his range of feeling. And in another great department of feeling we need not inquire into the character of the author of the inimitable sentence, "I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son." One is tempted to put it beside a remark which he makes on another occasion, "I yielded to the authority of a parent, and complied, like a pious son, with the wish of my own heart." Perhaps the heart which sanctioned his filial obedience in the latter case was not so opposed to it in the other as he would have us believe. It is better worth noting, however, that, in spite of the very tepid disposition illustrated by these familiar passages, Gibbon has affections as warm as are compatible with thorough comfort. He was not a passionate lover; and we cannot say, for he was not tried, that his friendship was of an heroic strain; but he had a very good supply of such affections as are wanted for the ordinary wear and tear of life—to provide a man with enough interests and sympathies to make society pleasant, and his family life agreeable. Nay, he seems to have been really generous and considerate beyond the ordinary pitch, and to have been a faithful friend, and excellent in some very delicate relationships. For a statesman, a religious teacher, or a poet, much stronger equipment in this direction might be desirable. But Gibbon had warmth enough to keep up a pleasant fireside, if not enough to fire the hearts of a nation. He clearly had enough passion for his historical vocation. A more passionate and imaginative person would hardly have written it at all. It requires a certain moderation of

character to be satisfied with a history instead of a wife, and Gibbon was so great an historian because he could accept such a substitute. No one capable of being a partisan could have preserved that stately march and equable development of the vast drama of human affairs which gives a monumental dignity to his great book. Even if you do not want to write another "Decline and Fall," is not such a disposition the most enviable of gifts? If such a life has less vivid passages, is there not something fascinating about that calm, harmonious existence, disturbed by no spasmodic storms, and yet devoted to one achievement grand enough to extort admiration even from the least sympathetic? Surely it is a happy mean; enough genius to be in the front rank, if not in the highest class, and yet that kind of genius which has an affinity to madness or disease, and virtue enough to keep up to the respectable level which justifies a comfortable self-complacency without suggesting any awkward deviations in the direction of martyrdom. That is surely the kind of composition which a man might desire if he were to calculate what character would give him the best chance of extracting the greatest possible amount of enjoyment out of life. Luckily for the world, if not for its heroes, men's characters cannot be fixed by such calculations; and a certain number of perverse people are even glad to possess vehement emotions and restless intellects, however conscious that the fiery soul will wear out the pigmy body. We try to persuade ourselves that they are not only choosing the noblest part, but acting most wisely for their own interests. It may be so; for the problem is a complex one. But it has not yet been proved that a man can always make the best of both worlds, and that the sacrifices imposed by virtue are always repaid in this life. Certainly it seems doubtful, when we have studied the self-written records of remarkable men, whether experience will confirm that pleasant theory; whether it is not more

probable that for simple employment it is not best to have one's nature pitched in a key below the highest. Most of us would make a very fair compromise if we should abandon our loftier claims on condition of being no worse than Gibbon.

CARLYLE'S ETHICS

I HAVE sometimes wondered of late what would have been the reception accorded to an autobiographical sketch by St. John the Baptist. It would, one may suppose, have contained some remarks not very palatable to refined society. The scoffers indeed would have covered their delight in an opportunity for lowering a great reputation by a plausible veil of virtuous indignation. The Pharisees would have taken occasion to dwell upon the immoral contempt of the stern prophet for the maxims of humdrum respectability. The Sadducees would have aired their orthodoxy by lamenting his open denunciations of shams, which, in their opinion, were quite as serviceable as real beliefs. Both would have agreed that nothing but a mean personal motive could have prompted such an outrageous utterance of discontent. And the good, kindly, well-meaning people—for, doubtless, there were some such even at the court of Herod—would have been sincerely shocked at the discovery that the vehement denunciations to which they had listened were in good truth the utterance of a tortured and unhappy nature, which took in all sincerity a gloomy view of the prospects of their society and the intrinsic value of its idols, instead of merely getting up indignation for purposes of pulpit oratory. They—complacent optimists, as kindly people are apt to be—have made up their minds that a genuine philosopher is always a benevolent, white-haired old gentleman, overflowing with philanthropic sentiment, convinced that all is for the

best, and that even the "miserable sinners" are excellent people at bottom; and are grievously shocked at the discovery that anybody can still believe in the existence of the devil as a potent agent in human affairs. If we have any difficulty in imagining such criticisms, we may easily realise them by reading certain criticisms upon the "Reminiscences" of the last prophet—for we may call him a prophet whatever we think of the sources of his inspiration—who has passed from among us. The reflection which has most frequently occurred to me is one put with characteristic force by Carlyle himself in describing the sight of Charles X. going to see the portrait of "the child of miracle." "How tragical are men once more; how merciless withal to one another! I had not the least pity for Charles Dix's pious pilgriming to such an object: the poor mother of it, and her immense hopes and pains, I did not even think of them." And so, the average criticism of that most tragical and pathetic monologue—in reality a soliloquy to which we have somehow been admitted—that prolonged and painful moan of remorse and desolation coming from a proud and intensely affectionate nature in its direst agony—a record which will be read with keen sympathy and interest when ninety-nine of a hundred of the best contemporary books have been abandoned to the moths—has been such as would have been appropriate for the flippant assault of some living penny-a-liner upon the celebrities of to-day. The critics have had an eye for nothing but the harshness and the gloom, and have read without a tear, without even a touch of sympathy, a confession more moving, more vividly reflecting the struggles and the anguish of a great man, than almost anything in our literature.

Enough of this: though in speaking of Carlyle at this time it is impossible to pass it over in complete silence. I intend only to say something of Carlyle's teaching, which seems to be as much misunderstood by some critics as his

character. It should require little impartiality or insight at the present day to do something like justice to a teacher who belonged essentially to a past generation. When Carlyle was still preaching upon questions of the day, my juvenile sympathies—such as they were—were always on the side of his opponents. But he and his opinions have passed into the domain of history, and we can, or at least we should, judge of them as calmly as we can of Burke and of Milton. In the year 1789 you might have sympathised with Mackintosh, or with Tom Paine, rather than with the great opponent of the Revolution; and you may even now hold that they were more in the right as to the immediate issues than Burke. But it would, indeed, be a narrow mind which could not now perceive that Burke, as a philosophic writer upon politics, towers like a giant amidst pigmies above the highest of his contemporaries; and that the value of his principles is scarcely affected by the particular application. Though Carlyle touched upon more recent events, we can already make the same distinction, and we must make it if we would judge fairly in his case.

The most obvious of all remarks about Carlyle is one expressed (I think) by Sir Henry Taylor in the phrase that he was "a Calvinist who had lost his creed." Rather we should say he was a Calvinist who had dropped the dogmas out of his creed. It is no doubt a serious question what remains of a creed when thus eviscerated; or, again, how long it is likely to survive such an operation. But for the present purpose it is enough to say that what remained for Carlyle was the characteristic temper of mind and the whole mode of regarding the universe. He often declared that the Hebrew Scriptures, though he did not adhere to the orthodox view of their authority, contained the most tenable theory of the world ever propounded to mankind. Without seeking to define what was the element which he had preserved, and what it was that he had abandoned, or

attempting the perilous task of drawing a line between the essence and accidents of a creed, it is in any case clear that Carlyle was as Scottish in faith as in character; that he would have taken and imposed the Covenant with the most thoroughgoing and *ex-animo* assent and consent; and that the difference between him and his forefathers was one rather of particular beliefs than of essential sentiment. He had changed rather the data upon which his convictions were based than the convictions themselves. He revered what his fathers revered, but he revered the same principle in other manifestations, and to them this would naturally appear as a profanation, whilst from his point of view it was but a legitimate extension of their fundamental beliefs.

The more one reads Carlyle the further one traces the consequences of this belief. The Puritan creed, one may say, is not popular at the present day for reasons which might easily be assigned; and those who dislike it in any form are not conciliated by the omission of its external peculiarities. And, on the other hand, the omission naturally alienates many who would otherwise sympathise. When Carlyle speaks of "the Eternities" and "the Silences," he is really using a convenient periphrasis for thoughts more naturally expressed by most people in the language peculiar to Cromwell—the translation is often given side by side with the original in the comments upon Cromwell's letters and speeches—and his mode of speech is dictated by the feeling that the old dogmatic forms are too narrow and too much associated with scholastic pedantry to be appropriate in presence of such awful mysteries. He is, as Teufelsdröckh would have said, dropping the old clothes of belief only that he may more fittingly express the living reality.

To Carlyle, for example, the later developments of Irvingism, the speaking with tongues, and so forth, appeared as simply contemptible, or, when sanctioned by

the friend whose memory he cherished so pathetically, as inexpressibly pitiable. It was a hopeless attempt to cling to the worn-out rags, a dropping of the substance to grasp the shadow; ending, therefore, in a mere grotesque caricature of belief which made genuine belief all the more difficult of attainment. You are seeking for outward signs and wonders when you should be impressed by the profound and all-pervading mysteries of the universe; and therefore falling into the hands of mere charlatans, and taking the morbid hysterics of over-excited women for the revelation conveyed by all nature to those who have ears to hear. Has not the word "spiritual," till now expressive of the highest emotions possible to human beings, got itself somehow stained and debased by association with the loathsome tricks practised by impostors aided by the prurient curiosity of their dupes? The perversion of the highest instincts which leads a man in his very anxiety to find a true prophet and spiritual leader to put up with some miserable Cagliostro—a quack working "miracles" by sleight of hand and phosphorus—appeared to Carlyle, and surely appeared to him most rightly, as the saddest of all conceivable aberrations of human nature; saddest because some men with a higher strain of character are amenable to such influences. But when Carlyle came to specify what was and what was not quackery of this kind, and included much that was still sacred to others, he naturally had to part company with many who would otherwise have sympathised. Miss Martineau, he tells us, was described as not only stripping herself naked, but stripping to the bone. Carlyle seems to some people to be performing this last operation, though to himself it appeared in the opposite light.

To Carlyle himself the liberation from the old clothes or external casing of belief constituted what he regarded as equivalent to the conversion of the "old Christian

people." He emerged, he tells us, into a higher atmosphere, and gained a "constant inward happiness that was quite royal and supreme, in which all temporal evil was transient and insignificant:" a happiness, he adds, which he never quite lost, though in later years it suffered more frequent eclipse. For this he held himself to be "endlessly indebted" to Goethe; for Goethe had in his own fashion trod the same path and achieved the same victory. Conversion, as meaning the conscious abandonment of beliefs which have once formed an integral and important part of a man's life, is a process which indeed must be very exceptional with all men of real force of character. Carlyle, it is plain, was so far from undergoing such a process, that he retained much which would have been little in harmony with the teaching of his master. For, whilst everybody can see that Goethe reached a region of philosophic serenity, we must take Carlyle's "royal and supreme happiness" a little on trust. If his earlier writings have some gleams of the happier mood, we are certainly much more frequently in the region of murky gloom, shrouded by the Tartarean and "fuliginous" vapours of the lower earth. If his studies of Goethe and German literature opened a door of escape from the narrow prejudices which made the air of Edinburgh oppressive to him, they certainly did not help him to shake off the old Puritan sentiments which were bred in the bone, and no mere external trapping.

Critics have spoken as though Carlyle had become a disciple of some school of German metaphysics. It is, doubtless, true enough that he valued the great German thinkers as representing to his mind a victorious reaction against the scepticism of Hume, or the materialism of Hume's French successors. But he sympathised with the general tendency without caring to bewilder himself in any of the elaborate systems evolved by Kant or his followers. The reader, he says in the earlier essay on

Novalis, "would err widely who supposed that this transcendental system of metaphysics was a mere intellectual card-castle, or logical hocus-pocus . . . without any bearing on the practical interests of men. On the contrary . . . it is the most serious in its purport of all philosophies propounded in these latter ages;" and he proceeds to indicate their purport, and to hint, as one writing for uncongenial readers, his respect for German "mysticism." He thought, that is, that these mystics, transcendentalists, and so forth, were vindicating faith against scepticism, idealism against materialism, a belief in the divine order against atheistic negations; and, moreover, that their fundamental creed was inexpugnable, resting on a basis of solid reason instead of outworn dogma. As for the superstructure, the systems of this or that wonderful professor to explain the universe in general, he probably held them to be "card-castles"—mere cobwebs of the brain—at best arid, tentative gropings in the right direction. He had far too much of true Scottish shrewdness—even in the higher regions of thought—to trust body or soul to the truth of such flimsy materials. This comes out in his view of Coleridge, who so far sympathised with him as to have imbibed consolation from the same sources. No reader of the life of Sterling can forget the chapter—one of the most vivid portraits ever drawn even by Carlyle—devoted to Coleridge as the oracle of the "innumerable brave souls" still engaged in the London turmoil—a portrait which suggests incidentally how much was left unspoken in the hastier touches of the "Reminiscences." We can see the oracle not answering your questions, nor decidedly setting out towards an answer, but accumulating "formidable apparatus, logical swimbladders, transcendental life-preservers, and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear for setting out; ending by losing himself in the morass and in the mazes of theosophic philosophy," where now and then "glorious islets" would

rise out of the haze, only to be lost again in the surrounding gloom. In his talk, as in him, "a ray of heavenly inspiration struggled in a tragically ineffectual degree against the weakness of flesh and blood." He had "skirted the deserts of infidelity," but "had not had the courage, in defiance of pain and terror, to press resolutely across such deserts to the new firm lands of faith beyond." Many disciples have of course seen more in Coleridge; but even his warmest admirers must admit the general truth of the picture, and confess that if Coleridge cast a leaven of much virtue into modern English speculation, he never succeeded in working out a downright answer to the philosophical perplexities of his day, or in promulgating a distinct rule of faith or life. To Carlyle this was enough to condemn Coleridge as a teacher. Coleridge, in his view, failed because he adhered to the "old clothes;" tried desperately to breathe life into dead creeds; and, encumbered with such burdens, could not make the effort necessary to cross the "desert." He lingered fatally round the starting-point, and succeeded only in starting "strange spectral Puseyisms, monstrous illusory hybrids, and ecclesiastical chimeras which now roam the earth in a very lamentable manner."

The judgment is in many ways characteristic of Carlyle. To the genuine Puritan a creed is nothing which does not immediately embody itself in a war-cry. It must have a direct forcible application to life. It must divide light from darkness, distinguish friends from enemies—both external and internal—nerve your arms for the battle, and plant your feet on solid standing-ground. It must be no flickering ray in the midst of gloom, but a steady, unquenchable light—a permanent "star to every wandering bark." Coleridge would stimulate only to uncertain musings, instead of animating to strenuous endeavour. The same sentiment utters itself in Carlyle's favourite exaltation of silence above speech—

a phrase paradoxical if literally taken, but in substance an emphatic assertion of the futility of the uncertain meanderings in the regions of abstract speculation which hinder a man from girding himself at once to deadly wrestle with the powers of darkness.

This is but a new version of the Puritan contempt for the vain speculations of human wisdom when he is himself conscious of an inner light guiding him infallibly through the labyrinths of the world. The Puritan contempt for æsthetic enjoyments springs from the same root, and is equally characteristic of Carlyle. He can never see much difference between fiction and lying. "Fiction," he says, "or idle falsity of any kind was never tolerable, except in a world which did itself abound in practical lies and solid shams. . . . A serious soul, can it wish, even in hours of relaxation, that you should fiddle empty nonsense to it? A serious soul would desire to be entertained either with silence or with what was truth, and had fruit in it, and was made by the Maker of us all,"—a doctrine which will clearly not commend itself to an æsthetic world. "Poetry, fiction in general, he (Carlyle the father) had universally seen treated as not only idle, but false and criminal," and the son adhered to the opinion except so far as he came to admit that fiction might in a sense be true. The ground-feeling is still that of some old Puritan, preaching, like Baxter, as "a dying man to dying men," and at most tolerant of anything not directly tending to edification. Carlyle, of course, belonged emphatically to the imaginative as distinguished from the speculative order of minds. He was a man of intuitions, not of discursive thought: who felt before he reasoned: to whom it was a mental necessity that a principle should clothe itself in concrete flesh and blood, and if possible in some definite historical hero, before he could fully believe in it. He wanted vivid images in place of abstract formulas. His indifference to the

metaphysical was not simply that of the practical man who regards all such inquiries as leading to hopeless and bottomless quagmires of doubt and a paralysis of all active will; as an attempt, doomed to failure from the beginning, to get off your own shadow, and to twist and twirl till your pigtail hangs before you; though this, too, counts for much in his teaching; but it was also the antipathy of the imaginative mind to the passionless analyser who "explains" the living organism by reducing it to a dead mechanism. It is, indeed, remarkable that Carlyle had a certain comparative respect even for the materialist and utilitarian whom he so harshly denounced. Such a man was at least better than the ineffectual dilettante or dealer in small shams and phantasms. Anything thoroughgoing, even a thoroughgoing rejection of the highest elements of life, so far deserved respect as at least affording some firm starting-point. But, for the most part, the scientific frame of mind, so far as it implies a tranquil dissecting of concrete phenomena into their dead elements, jarred upon every fibre of his nature. Political economy, which treats society as a complex piece of machinery, and the logic which resolves the universe itself into a mere heap of separable atoms, seemed to him hopelessly barren, and uninteresting to the higher mind. Mill's talk and books—which specially represented this mode of thought for him—were "sawdustish;" for what is sawdust but the dead product of a living growth deprived of its organising principle and reduced to mere dry indigestible powder? To the poetic as to the religious nature of Carlyle, such a process was to make the whole world weary, stale, flat and unprofitable. Carlyle, therefore, must be judged as a poet, and not as a dealer in philosophic systems; as a seer or a prophet, not as a theorist or a man of calculations. And, therefore, if I were attempting any criticism of his literary merits, I should dwell upon his surpassing power in his

peculiar province. Admitting that every line he wrote has the stamp of his idiosyncrasies, and consequently requires a certain congeniality of temperament in the reader, I should try to describe the strange spell which it exercises over the initiated. If you really hate the grotesque, the gloomy, the exaggerated, you are of course disqualified from enjoying Carlyle. You must take leave of what ordinarily passes even for common-sense, of all academical canons of taste, and of any weak regard for symmetry or simplicity before you enter the charmed circle. But if you can get rid of your prejudices for the nonce, you will certainly be rewarded by seeing visions such as are evoked by no other magician. The common-sense reappears in the new shape of strange vivid flashes of humour and insight casting undisputed gleams of light into many dark places; and dashing off graphic portraits with a single touch. And if you miss the serene atmosphere of calmer forms of art, it is something to feel at times as no one but Carlyle can make you feel, that each instant is the "conflux of two eternities;" that our little lives, in his favourite Shakespearean phrase, are "rounded with a sleep;" that history is like the short space lighted up by a flickering taper in the midst of infinite glooms and mysteries, and its greatest events brief scenes in a vast drama of conflicting forces, where the actors are passing in rapid succession—rising from and vanishing into the all-embracing darkness. And if there is something oppressive to the imagination when we stay long in this singular region, over which the same inspiration seems to be brooding which created the old Northern mythology with its grim gigantesque, semi-humorous figures, we are rewarded by the vividness of the pictures standing out against the surrounding emptiness; some little groups of human figures, who lived and moved like us in the long-past days; or of vignettes of scenery, like the Alpine sunrise in the "Sartor Resartus," or the sight

of sleeping Haddington from the high moorland in the "Reminiscences," as bright and vivid for us as our own memories, and revealing unsuspected sensibilities in the writer. Though he scorned the word-painters and description-mongers, no one was a better landscape painter. It is perhaps idle to dwell upon characteristics which one either feels or cannot be persuaded into feeling. Those to whom he is on the whole repugnant may admit him to be occasionally a master of the picturesque; and sometimes endeavour to put him out of court on the strength of this formula. A mere dealer, many exclaim, in oddities and grotesques, who will sacrifice anything to produce a startling effect, whose portraits are caricatures, whose style is torn to pieces by excessive straining after emphasis, and who systematically banishes all those half-tones which are necessary to faithful portraiture in the search after incessant contrasts of light and shade.

Let us first remark in regard to this that Carlyle himself peremptorily and emphatically denied that the distinction here assumed between the poet and the philosopher could be more than superficial. The philosopher only reaches his goal so far as his analysis leads to a synthesis, or as his abstract speculations can be embodied in definite concrete vision. And the poet is a mere idler, with no substantial or permanent value in him, unless he is uttering thoughts equally susceptible of philosophical exposition. "The hero," he says, "can be poet, prophet, king, priest, or what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into. I confess I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be all sorts of men. The poet who could merely sit on a chair and compose stanzas could never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the heroic warrior, unless he himself were an heroic warrior too." To this doctrine—though with various logical distinctions and qualifications which seem incongruous with Carlyle's vehement dogmatic

utterances—I, for one, would willingly subscribe; and I hold further that in strenuously asserting and enforcing it Carlyle was really laying down the fundamental doctrine of all sound criticism, whether of art or literature or life. Any teaching, that is, which attempts to separate the poet from the man as though his excellence were to be measured by a radically different set of tests is, to my mind, either erroneous or trifling and superficial. The point at which one is inclined to part company with this teaching is different. I do not condemn Carlyle for judging the poet as he judges the hero, for the substantial worth of the man whom it reveals to us; but I admit that his ideal man has a certain stamp of Puritanical narrowness. So, for example, there is something characteristic in his judgments not only of Coleridge, but of Lamb or Scott. He judges Lamb as the spoilt child of Cockney circles, as the Baptist in his garment of camel's hair might have judged some favourite courtier cracking jokes for the amusement of Herodias' daughter. And of Scott, though he strives to do justice to the pride of all Scotchmen, and admits Scott's merit in breathing life into the past, his real judgment is based upon the maxim that literature must have higher aims "than that of harmlessly amusing indolent languid men." Scott was not one who had gone through spiritual convulsions, who had "dwelt and wrestled amid dark pains and throes," but on the whole a prosperous easy-going gentleman, who found out the art of "writing impromptu novels to buy farms with;" and who can therefore by no means claim the entire devotion of the rigorous ascetic prophet to whom happiness is inconceivable except as the reward of victorious conflicts with the deadly enemies of the soul. To me it seems that the error in such judgments is one of omission; but the omission is certainly considerable. For Carlyle's tacit assumption seems to be that the conscience should be not only the supreme but the single faculty of the soul; that morality is not only a

necessary but the sole condition of all excellence; and, therefore, that an ethical judgment is not merely implied in every æsthetic judgment, but is the sole essence and meaning of it. Our minds, according to some of his Puritan teachers, should be so exclusively set upon working out our salvation that every kind of aim not consciously directed to this ultimate end is a trifling which is closely akin to actual sin. Carlyle, accepting or unconsciously imbibing the spirit of such teaching, reserves his whole reverence for rigid and lofty natures, deserving beyond all question of reverence, but wanting in elements essential to the full development of our natures, and therefore, in the long run, to a broad morality.

This leads us to his most emphatically asserted doctrines. No one could assert more forcibly, emphatically, and frequently than Carlyle that morality or justice is the one indispensable thing; that justice means the law of God; that the sole test of the merits of any human law is its conformity to the divine law; and that, as he puts it, all history is an "inarticulate Bible, and in a dim intricate manner reveals the divine appearances in this lower world. For God did make this world, and does for ever govern it; the loud roaring loom of time, with all its French revolutions, Jewish revelations, 'weaves the vesture thou seest Him by.' There is no biography of a man, much less any history or biography of a nation, but wraps in it a message out of heaven, addressed to the hearing ear and the not-hearing." It is needless to quote particular passages. This clearly is the special doctrine of Carlyle, embodied in all his works; preached in season and (often enough) out of season; which possesses him rather than is possessed by him; the sum and substance of the message which he had to deliver to the world, and spent his life and energy in delivering with emphasis. And yet we are constantly told that Carlyle was a cynic who believed in nothing but brute force. If such a

criticism came only from those who had been repelled by his style from reading his books—or again, only from the shallow and Pharisaical, who mistake any attack upon the arrangements to which they owe their comfort for an attack upon the eternal laws of the universe—it might be dismissed with contempt. And this is, indeed, all that much of the average talk about Carlyle deserves. But there is a more solid ground in the objection, which brings us in face of Carlyle's most disputable teaching, and is worth considering.

We have, in fact, to consider the principle so often ascribed to him that Might makes Right; and this may be interpreted into the immoral doctrine that force is the one thing admirable, and success the sole test of merit. Cromwell was right because he cut off Charles's head, and Charles wrong because he lost his head. Frederick's political immorality is condoned because Frederick succeeded in making Prussia great; Napoleon was right so long as he was victorious, and was condemned because he ended in St. Helena. That, as some critics suppose, was Carlyle's meaning, and they very naturally denounce it as an offensive and cynical theory.

Now in one sense Carlyle's doctrine is the very reverse of this. His theory is the opposite one, that Right makes Might. He admires Cromwell, for example, and Cromwell is the hero after his own heart, expressly on the ground that Cromwell is the perfect embodiment of the Puritan principle, and that the essence of Puritanism was to "see God's own law made good in this world. . . . Eternal justice; that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven; corollaries enough will flow from that, if that be there; if that be not there, no corollary good for much will flow." How does a doctrine apparently at least implying an unqualified belief in the absolute supremacy of right, a conviction that nothing but the rule of right can give a satisfactory basis for any human arrangement, get itself

transmuted into an appearance of the opposite, of being a kind of Hobbism, deducing all morality from sheer force? Such transmutations, or apparent meetings of opposite extremes, are not uncommon, and the process might perhaps be most forcibly illustrated by a history of the old Puritans themselves. But it will be quite enough for my purpose to indicate, as briefly as may be, Carlyle's own method, which is of course guided as well by his temper as by his primary assumptions. He is pre-disposed in every way to take the sternest view of morality. He means by virtue, by no means an indiscriminate extension of all-comprehending benevolence, of goodwill to rogues and scoundrels, or amiable desire that everybody should have as pleasant a time of it as possible. Justice, according to him, and the most stringent and unflinching justice, is the essential basis of all morality. Love, doubtless, is the fulfilling of the law; but along with that truth you must also recognise the awful and mysterious truth, that hell itself is one product of the divine love. Love itself implies the destruction of evil and of the evil-doers. From this assumption it is not surprising if much modern philanthropy appeared to him as mere sentimentalism, a weak sympathy even for the suffering which is the divinely appointed remedy for social diseases, the mere effeminate shrinking from the surgical knife. The cardinal virtue from which all others might be inferred is not benevolence, but veracity, respect for facts and hatred of shams. This was not with Carlyle, as with some of his teachers, an abstract theorem of metaphysics, but the expression of his whole character, of that Puritanic fervour which tested all doctrine by its immediate practical influence upon the will, and which forced even his poetical imagination to spend itself not in creating images, but in realising as vividly as possible the actual facts of history.

Carlyle's application of these principles brings out a remarkable result. "Puritanism," he says, "was a

genuine thing, for Nature has adopted it, and it has grown and grows. I say sometimes, that everything goes by wager of battle in this world; that *strength*, well understood, is the measure of all worth. Give a thing time; if it can succeed it is a right thing." This is one form of Carlyle's essential principle, and is it not also the essential principle of Mr. Darwin's famous theory? It is an explicit assertion of the doctrine of the struggle for existence, though applied here to Knox and the Puritans instead of to the origin of species. And yet, as we may note in passing, the evolutionists are, as a fact, the most ready to condemn Carlyle's immorality, whilst Carlyle could never find words adequate to express his contempt for them. In that thorough carrying out of this principle, Carlyle is approaching that profound problem which in one shape or other haunts all philosophies: What kind of victory may we expect for right in this world? If Might and Right were strictly identical, it would seem here that we might start indifferently from either basis. "This succeeds; therefore it is right," would be as tenable an argument as—"This is right; therefore it will succeed." Yet one doctrine has an edifying sound, and the other seems to be the very reverse of edifying. Moralists vie with each other in proclaiming their belief in the ultimate success of good causes, and yet indignantly deny that the goodness of a cause should be inferred from its success. We agree to applaud the prophecy, cited with applause by Carlyle himself, that Napoleon's empire would fail because founded upon injustice; but we are startled by an inference from the failure to the injustice. But why should there be so vast a difference in what seem to be equivalent modes of reasoning? Carlyle's answer would follow from the words just cited. You must, he says, "give a thing time." Nobody can deny the temporary prosperity of the wicked, and certainly Carlyle could not deny that

injustice may flourish long before it produces the inevitable crash. "The mills of God grind slowly, though they grind exceeding small." And, therefore, it may make all the difference whether we make the success the premiss or the conclusion. For though, in the long run, the good causes may be trusted to succeed in time, and we may see in history the proof that they have succeeded, yet at any moment the test of success may be precarious whilst that of justice is infallible. We may distinguish the wheat from the tares before the reaper has cast one aside and preserved the other. At the moment the injustice of Napoleon's empire was manifest, though the cracks and fissures which were to cause its crumbling were still hidden from any observer.

By what signs, then, other than the ultimate test of success, can we discern the just from the unjust? That, of course, is the vital point which must decide upon the character of Carlyle's morality; and it is one which, in my opinion, he cannot be said to have answered distinctly. He gives, indeed, a test satisfactory to himself, and he enforces and applies it with superabundant energy and variety of phrase. That is right, one may say briefly, which will "work." The sham is hollow, and must be crushed in the tug and wrestle of the warring world. The reality survives and gathers strength. Veracity in equivalent phrase is the condition of vitality. Truth endures; the lie perishes. But in applying this or his vast vocabulary of similar phrases, we come to a difficulty. "The largest veracity ever *done* in Parliament," was, he says, Sir Robert Peel's abolition of the Corn Laws. But how can you *do* a veracity? What is a lie?—a question, as he observes, worth asking by the "practical English mind;" and to which he accordingly proceeds to give an answer. He insists, that is, very eloquently and vehemently, upon the inevitable results of all lying, and of all legislative and other action which

proceeds upon the assumption of a falsity or an error which passes itself off for a truth. In all which I, for one, admit that there is not only truth, but truth nobly expressed and applied to the confutation of some most pestilent errors; and yet, as one must also admit, there is still an ambiguity. May it not, in fact, cover that exaltation of mere success which is so often objected to him. Some tyrannical institution—slavery, for example—lives and flourishes through long ages. Is it thereby justified? Is it not a fact, and if fact and truth are the same things, is it not a truth sanctioned by the eternal veracities and so forth, and therefore entitled to our respect? This is one more form of that fundamental problem which really perplexes Carlyle's moral teaching, and which he has at least the merit of bringing into prominence, though not of answering. In fact, we may recognise in it an ancient philosophical controversy not yet set at rest; for, since the beginning of ethical theorising, thinkers of various schools have tried in one way or other to deduce virtue from truth, and to identify all vice with error. But the reference is enough to show the difference of Carlyle's method. He might respect the metaphysician who held a doctrine so far analogous to his own; but the metaphysical method appeared to him as a mere formal logic-chopping where the essence of the teaching escaped amidst barren demonstrations of verbal identities.

The real answer is here again a new version of the old Puritan answer. The Puritan fell back upon the will of God revealed through the Bible, whose authority was manifest by the inner light. If the wicked were allowed to triumph for a time, there was no danger of being misled by their success, for they were condemned in advance by the plain fact of their renunciation of the inspired guide. For Carlyle, the "hero" takes the place of, or rather is put side by side with, the older organs of

inspiration. Every hero conveys in fact a new revelation to mankind; he conveys a divine message, not, it is true, with infallible precision, or without an admixture of human error, but still the very kernel and essence of his teaching. He may come as prophet, king, poet, or philosopher, and you may reject or accept his message at your peril. You may recognise it, as the Puritan recognised the authority of his Bible, by the spontaneous witness of your higher nature, and you will recognise it so long as you have not given yourself up to believe a lie. And if you demand some external proofs you must be referred, not to some particular signs and wonders, but to what you may, if you please, call the "success" of the message; the fact, that is, that the hero has contributed some permanent element to the thoughts and lives of mankind, that he has revealed some enduring truth, created some permanent symbol of our highest feelings, or wrought some organic change in the very structure of society. There is a danger undoubtedly of confounding some temporary crystal palace or dazzling edifice of mere glass with an edifice founded on the rock and solid as the pyramids. The hero may be confounded with the sham, as unfortunately shams and realities are most frequently confounded in this world. But they differ for all that, and the true man recognises the difference, as the religious man knows the hypocrite from the saint. The test is indifferently the truth or the soundness of the work; they must coincide; but the test can only be applied by one who really loves the truth.

It is easy to point out the dangers of this position. It rests, after all, you may say upon the individual conviction, and lends itself too easily to that kind of dogmatism in which Carlyle indulged so freely, and which consists in asserting that any doctrine or system which he dislikes is an incarnate lie, and pronouncing that it is therefore doomed to failure. And, on the other hand, it may be

equally perverted in the opposite direction by claiming a sacred character for every "lie" not yet exploded. Carlyle, beyond all question, was a man of intense prejudices, and the claim to inspiration, even to the inspiration of our teachers, very easily passes into a deification of our own prejudices. No one was more liable to that error; but it is better worth our while to look at some other aspect of his teaching.

For we may surely accept without hesitation one application of the doctrine, which is of the first importance with Carlyle, and which he has taught so incessantly and impressively that to him more than to any other man may be attributed the general recognition of its truth. The success of any system of thought—the permanent influence, that is, of any great man or of any great institution—must be due to the truth which it contained, or to its real value to mankind. This doctrine has become so much of a commonplace, and harmonises so fully with all modern historical methods, that we are apt to overlook the service done by Carlyle in its explicit assertion and rigorous application to facts. When he was delivering his lectures upon hero-worship, intelligent people were still in the attitude of mind represented, for example, by Gibbon's famous explanation of the success of Christianity, as due, amongst other things, to the zeal of the early believers, as if the zeal required no explanation; when, on the other side, it was thought proper to explain Mahometanism, not by the admixture of genuine truth which it contained, but as a simple imposture. Carlyle still speaks like a man advancing a disputed theory when he urges in this latter case that to explain the power of Mahomet's sword, you must explain the force which wielded the sword; and that the ingenious hypothesis of a downright cheat will by no means serve the turn. This doctrine is now generally accepted, unless by a few clever people who still cherish the wire-pulling heresy

which makes history a puppet-show manipulated by ingenious scoundrels, instead of a vast co-operation of organic forces. Carlyle, however, has done more than any writer to make such barren and degrading explanations impossible for all serious thinkers. His "Cromwell" has at least exploded once for all the simple-minded "hypocrisy" theory, as the essay upon Johnson destroyed the ingenious doctrine that a man could write a good book simply because he was a fool. Whether his portraits are accurate or not, they are at least set before us as conceivable and consistent human beings. The prosaic historian and biographer takes the average verdict of commonplace observers: if he is a partisan, he is content with the contemporary caricatures of the party to which he belongs; if he wishes to be impartial, he strikes a rough average between opposite errors; and if he wishes to be dazzling, he calmly combines incompatible judgments. Macaulay's works, with all their merits, are a perfect gallery of such portraits—rhetorically excellent, but hopelessly flimsy in substance: of angelic Whigs and fiendish Tories, and of strange monsters like his Bacon and his Boswell, made by quietly heaping together meanness and wisdom, sense and folly, and inviting you to accept a string of paradoxes as a sober statement of fact. The truly imaginative writer has to go deeper than this. He begins where the rhetorician ends. A great work, as he instinctively sees, implies a great force. A man can only leave his mark upon history so far as he is animated, and therefore worthy to be animated, by a great idea. The secret of his nature is to be discovered by a sympathetic imagination acting by a kind of poetical induction. Gathering together all his recorded acts and utterances, the masses of recorded facts, preserved, often in hopeless confusion and misrepresentation, by his contemporaries, you must brood over them till at last you gain a clear vision of the underlying unity of character which manifests

itself in these various ways. Then, at last, you may recognise the true hero, and discover unsuspected unity of purpose and strength of conviction, where the hasty judgments passed by contemporaries and those who set them upon isolated fragments of his career, make a bewildering chaos of inconsistency. The process is admirably illustrated in the study of Cromwell, and the result has the merit of being at least a possible, if not a correct, theory of a great man.

This, again, is connected with another aspect of Carlyle's teaching—as valuable, though perhaps its value is not even now as generally recognised. For the tendency of his mind is always to substitute what is sometimes called the dynamical for the merely mechanical view of history. It is a necessity for his imagination to penetrate as much to the centre instead of remaining at the circumference; to unveil the actual forces which govern the working of the superficial phenomena, instead of losing himself in the external phenomena themselves. The true condition for understanding history is to gain a clear perception of the genuine beliefs, the wants and passions which actually sway men's souls, instead of working simply at the complicated wheels and pulleys of the political machinery, or accepting the masses of idle verbiage which conceal our true thoughts from ourselves and from each other. An implicit faith in the potency of the machinery, and an equal neglect of the real driving force, was, in his view, the original sin of political theory. The constitution-mongers of the Delolme or Siéyès type, the men who fancied that government (as one of them said) was like "a dance where everything depended on the disposition of the figures," and nothing, therefore, on the nature of the dancers, have pretty well passed away. Carlyle saw the same vital fallacies in such nostrums as the ballot or the scheme so enthusiastically advocated by Hare and Mill. "If of ten men nine are recognisable as

fools, which is a common calculation, how in the name of wonder will you get a ballot-box to grind you out a wisdom from the votes of those ten men? Never by any conceivable ballot-box, nor by all the machinery in Bromwicham or out of it, will you attain such a result." Whether Carlyle was right or wrong in the particular application I do not presume to say. Such a change as the ballot may perhaps imply more than a mere change of machinery. But I certainly cannot doubt that he is right in the essence of his contention: that a perception of the difference between the merely mechanical details and the vital forces of a society is essential to any sound political theorising; and that half our pet schemes of reform fail just from this cause, that they expect to change the essence by modifying the surface, and are therefore equivalent to plans for obtaining mechanical results without expending energy.

To have asserted these principles so emphatically is one of Carlyle's greatest merits; and if he obtained emphasis at the cost of exaggeration, overstatement, grotesque straining of language and imagery, and much substantial error as to facts, I can only say that the service remains, and is inestimable. But there is a less pleasing qualification to be made. The objection to the ballot as a purely mechanical arrangement is combined, as we have just seen, with the objection founded upon the prevalence of fools. That stinging phrase, "mostly fools," has stuck in our throats. The prophet who tells us that we are wicked may be popular—perhaps, because our consciences are on his side; but the prophet who calls us fools is likely to provoke our wrath. I, at least, never met a man who relished that imputation, even if he admitted it to contain a grain of truth. But, palatable or not, it is clearly fundamental with Carlyle. The world is formed of "dull millions, who, as a dull flock, roll hither and thither, whithersoever they are led;" the great men are

the "guides of the dull host, who follow them as by an irrevocable decree." They are the heroes to whom alone are granted real powers of vision and command; realities amongst shams, and knowers amongst vague feelers after knowledge. We need not ask how this theory was reached; whether it is the spontaneous sentiment of a proud and melancholy character, or really a fair estimate of the facts; or, again, a deduction from the "hero" doctrine. With that doctrine, at any rate, it naturally coincides. To exalt the stature of your hero, you must depress his fellows. If Gulliver is to be a giant, he must go to Lilliput. There is, however, a gap in the argument which is characteristically neglected by Carlyle. He would never have fairly accepted the doctrine—whose was it?—that, though a man may be wiser than anybody there is something wiser than he—namely, everybody. The omission is critical, and has many consequences. For one may fully admit Carlyle's estimate: one may hold the difference between a Shakespeare and an average contributor to the poet's corner of a newspaper, or between a born leader of men, a Cromwell and a Chatham, and the enormous majority of his followers, as something hardly expressible in words: one may admit that the history of thought or society reveals the more clearly, the more closely it is studied, the height to which the chosen few tower above the average; one may even diminish the percentage of the wise from a tenth to a hundredth or a thousandth: and yet one may hold to the superior wisdom of the mass. No ballot-box, it is true, will make the folly of the nine equal to the wisdom of the one. Or it can tend that way only if the foolish majority have some sense of the need of superior guidance. But the ignorance and folly of mankind, their incapacity for forming any trustworthy judgment on any given point, may also be consistent with a capacity for groping after truth, and they have the advantage of trying experiments

on a large scale. The fact that a creed commends itself to the instincts of many men in many ages is a better proof—Carlyle himself being the judge—that it contains some truth than the isolated judgment of the most clear-sighted philosopher. The fact that an institution actually makes men happy and calls forth their loyalty is a more forcible argument in its favour than the opinion of the most experienced statesman. And, therefore, the fact that any society is chiefly made up of fools is quite consistent with the belief that it is collectively the organ through which truth gradually manifests itself and wins a wider recognition. *Securus judicat orbis* may be a true maxim if we interpret it to mean that the world decides—not as the experimenter but as the experiment. Carlyle systematically overlooks this blind semi-conscious process of co-operation upon which the "hero" is really as dependent as the dull flock which he leads. History, as he is fond of saying, is the essence of innumerable biographies. To find the essence of the biographies, again, he goes to the essential biographies; that is, to the biographies of the men who give the impulse, not of those who passively submit to the impulse. This apotheosis of the individual is dictated by his imaginative idiosyncrasy, as much as by his theory of history. He must have the picturesque concrete fact; the living hero to be the incarnation of the idea; and, accordingly, history in his page is like a gigantic panorama in which the painter sacrifices everything to obtain the strongest contrasts, and makes his lights stand out against vast breadths of unspeakable gloom. The hero is thus made to sum up the whole effectual force, and all that is done by the Greeks is attributed to the arm of Achilles. Some awkward results follow. Frederick is a hero who has obvious moral defects, and readers are startled by Carlyle's worship of such an idol. Yet it follows from the assumptions. For Frederick, in Carlyle's theory, means the development of

the German nation. That the growth of the German influence in Europe was a phenomenon which naturally and rightfully excited Carlyle's strongest enthusiasm requires no demonstration. If the credit of that, as of every other great achievement, must be given to some solitary hero, Frederick doubtless has the best claim to the honour. We may no doubt say that Frederick, in spite of this, was selfish and cynical, and may confine our praises to allowing his possession of perspicacity enough to see the capabilities of his position. A great man may do an involuntary service to mankind, because his genius inclines him to range himself on the side of the strongest forces, and therefore of what we vaguely call progress. But the hero-worshipper naturally regards him as not merely an instrument, but the conscious and efficient cause of the progress itself.

Hence, too, the apparent immorality which some people discern in Carlyle's denunciations of "red tape" formulas, and the ordinary conventions of society. Undoubtedly, such fetters must snap like packthread when opposed to the deeper forces which govern the growth of nations. No set of engagements on paper will keep a nation on its legs if it is rotten at the core, or maintain a balance of power between forces which are daily growing unequal. It is idle to suppose that any contract could bind, or otherwise can preserve, the vitality of effete institutions. And hence arise a good many puzzling questions for political casuistry. It is hard to say at what precise point it becomes necessary to snap the bonds, and when the necessity of change makes revolution, with all its mischiefs, preferable to stagnation. The hero-worshipper who regards his idol as the supreme moving force, has to make him also the infallible judge in such matter. He stands above—not the ultimate rules of morality, but—the whole system of regulations and compromises by which men must govern themselves in

normal times—and decides when they must be suspended in the name of the higher law. The only appeal from his decision is the appeal to facts. If the apparent hero be really self-seeking and vulgarly ambitious, he and his empire will be crushed like Napoleon's. If, on the whole, his decision be right, as inspired from above, he will lay the foundations of a new order on an unshakable basis. And, therefore, Carlyle is naturally attracted to the revolutionary periods, when the underlying forces come to the surface; when the foundations of the great deep are broken up, all conventions summarily swept aside, and the direct as well as the ultimate attention is to the great principles of its social life. Therefore he sympathises with Mirabeau, who had "swallowed all formulas," and still more with Cromwell, whose purpose, in his view, was to make the laws of England a direct application of the laws of God. Puritan and Jacobin are equally impatient for the instantaneous advent of the millennium, and so far attract equally the man who shares their hatred of compromise and temporising with the world.

Here we come to the final problem. Cromwell's Parliament, he says, failed in their attempt to realise their "noble, and surely necessary, attempt." Nay, they "could not but fail;" they had "the sluggishness, the slavish half-and-halfness, the greediness, the cowardice, and general fatuity and falsity of some ten million men against it—alas! the whole world and what we call the Devil and all his angels against it!" This is the true revolutionary doctrine. The fact that a reform would only succeed fully if men were angels is with the ordinary Conservative a reason for not reforming at all; and with your genuine fanatic a reason not for declining the impracticable, but for denouncing the facts. We have, however, to ask how it fits in with any such theory of progress as was possible for Carlyle. For some such theory must be held by anyone who makes the victory of

truth and justice over shams and falsehoods a corner-stone of his system. It has been asked, in fact, whether there is not a gross inconsistency here. If Cromwell's success proved him to be a hero, did not the Restoration upset the proof? The answer, frequently and emphatically given by Carlyle, as in the lecture on the hero as king, is an obvious one. Cromwell represents an intermediate stage between Luther and the French Revolution. Luther told the Pope that he was a "chimera;" and the French gave the same piece of information to other "chimeras." The whole process is a revolt against certain gigantic shams, and the success very inadequately measured by any special incident in the struggle. The French Revolution, with all its horrors, was a "return to truth," though, as it were, to a truth "clad in hellfire:" and its advent should be hailed as "shipwrecked mariners might hail the sternest rock, in a world otherwise all of baseless seas and waves." And throughout this vast revolutionary process, our hope rests upon the "certainty of heroes being sent us;" and that certainty "shines like a polestar, through murk dustclouds, and all manner of down-rushing and conflagration."

It is well that we have a "certainty" of the coming hero; for the essay seems to show the weakness of all excessive reliance upon individuals. Cromwell's life, as he tells us emphatically, was the life of the Commonwealth, and Cromwell's life was at the mercy of a "stray bullet." Where then is a certainty of progress in a world thus dependent upon solitary heroes, in a wilderness of fools, liable to be snuffed out at a moment's notice? So far as certainty means a scientific conviction resting on the observation of facts, we, of course, cannot have it. It is a certainty which follows from our belief in the overruling power which will send heroes when there is work for heroes to do. And Carlyle can at times, especially in his earlier writings, declare his faith in such a progress with

full conviction. "The English Whig," says Herr Teufelsdröckh, "has, in the second generation, become an English Radical, who, in the third, it is to be hoped, will become an English rebuilder. Find mankind where thou wilt, thou findest it in living movement, in progress faster or slower; the phœnix soars aloft, hovers with outstretched wings, filling earth with her music; or, as now, she sinks, and with spheral swansong immolates herself in flame, that she may soar the higher and sing the clearer." And the phrase, as I think, gives the theory which in fact is more or less explicitly contained in all Carlyle's writings.

It is plain, however, that progress, so understood, is a progress consistent with long periods of the reverse of progress. It implies an alternation of periods of reconstruction and vital energy with others of decay and degeneration. And in this I do not know that Carlyle differs from other philosophers. Few people are sanguine enough to hold that every generation improves upon the preceding. But the modern believer in progress undoubtedly believes that this actual generation is better than the last, and that the next will be better still; and is very apt to impute bad motives to anyone who differs from him. Here, of course, he must come into flat opposition to Carlyle. For Carlyle, to put it briefly, regarded the present state of things as analogous to that of the Lower Empire; a time of dissolution of old bonds and of a general ferment which was destroying the very tissues of society. So far he agrees, of course, with many Conservatives; but he differs from them in regarding the process as necessary, and even ultimately beneficial. The disease is one which must run its course; the best hope is that it may run it quickly; the attempt to suppress the symptoms and to regain health by making time run backwards is simply chimerical. Thus he was in the painful position of one who sees a destructive process going on of

which he recognises the necessity whilst all the immediate results are bad.

To the ardent believer in progress such a state of mind is, of course, repulsive. It implies misanthropy, cynicism, and disbelief in mankind. Nor can anybody deny that Carlyle's gloomy and dyspeptic constitution palpably biassed his view of his contemporaries as well as of their theories. The "mostly fools" expresses a deeply rooted feeling, and we might add "mostly bores," and to a great extent humbugs. And this, of course, implies a very low estimate of the powers of unheroic mankind, and therefore of their rights. If most men are fools, their right to do as they please is a right to knock their heads against stone walls. Carlyle perhaps overlooked the fact that even that process may be useful training for fools. But even here he asserted a doctrine wrongly applied rather than false in principle. It shocks one to find an open advocacy of slavery for black Quashee. But we must admit, and admit for the reasons given by Carlyle, that even slavery may be better than sheer anarchy and barbarism; that, historically speaking, the system of slavery represents a necessary stage in civilisation; and therefore that the simple abolition of slavery—a recognition of unconditional "right" without reference to the possession of the instincts necessary for higher kinds of society—might be disguised cruelty. The error was in the hasty assumption that his Quashee was, in fact, in this degraded state; and the haste to accept this disheartening belief was but too characteristic. That liberty might mean barbarism was true; that it actually did mean it in certain given cases was a rash assumption too much in harmony with his ordinary aversion to the theorists of his time.

This applies to all Carlyle's preachings about contemporary politics; the weakest of his writings are those in which his rash dogmatism, coloured by his gloomy temperament, was employed upon unfamiliar topics. But

the pith and essence of them all is the intense conviction that the one critical point for modern statesmen is the creation of a healthy substratum to the social structure. That the lives of the great masses are squalid, miserable, and vicious, and must be elevated by the spread of honesty, justice, and the unflinching extirpation of corrupt elements, the substitution of rigorous rulers for idle professors of official pedantry, busy about everything but the essential —that is the sum and substance of the teaching. That he attributes too much to the legislative power, and has too little belief in the capacities of the average man, may be true enough. But this one thing must be said in conclusion. The bitterness, the gloom, even the apparent brutality, is a proof of the strength of his sympathies. He is savage with the physician because he is appalled at the virulence of the disease and the inadequacy of the remedy. He may shriek "quack" too hastily, and be too ready to give over the patient as desperate. And yet I am frequently struck by a contrast. I meet a good friend who holds up his hands at Carlyle's ferocity. We talk, and I find that he holds that in politics we are all going to sheer destruction or "shooting Niagara"; that the miserable Radicals are sapping all public spirit; that faith is being undermined by malcontents and atheists; that the merchant has become a gambler, and the tradesman a common cheat; that the "British workman" is a phrase which may be used with the certainty of provoking a sneer; and, briefly, that there is not a class in the country which is not on the high-road to decay, or an institution beyond the reach of corruption. And yet my friend sits quietly down and enjoys his dinner as heartily as if he were expecting the millennium. What shall I say? That he does not believe what he says, or that his digestive apparatus was in most enviable order? I know not; but certainly Carlyle was not capable of this. He took things too terribly in earnest. When workmen

scamped the alterations in his house, or the railway puffed its smoke into his face, he saw visible symbols of modern degeneracy, and thought painfully of the old honest wholesome life in Annandale—of steady God-fearing farmers and self-respecting workmen. All that swept away by progress and "prosperity beyond example"! That was his reflection; perhaps it was very weak, as certainly it was very unpleasant to worry himself about what he could not help, and sprang, let us say, all from a defective digestion. And yet, though I cannot think without pity of the man of genius who felt so keenly and thought so gloomily of the evils around us, I feel infinitely more respect for his frame of mind than for that of the man who, sharing, verbally at least, this opinion, can let it calmly lie in his mind without the least danger to his personal comfort.

THE STATE TRIALS

It sometimes strikes readers of books that literature is, on the whole, a snare and a delusion. Writers, of course, do not generally share that impression; and, on the contrary, have said a great many fine things about the charm of conversing with the choice minds of all ages, with the *innuendo*, to use the legal phrase, that they themselves modestly demand some place amongst the aforesaid choice minds. But at times we are disposed to retort upon our teachers. Are you not, we observe, exceedingly given to humbug? The youthful student takes the poet's ecstasies and agonies in solemn earnest. We who have grown a little wiser cannot forget with what complacency the poet has often devised a new agony; how he has set it to a pretty tune; how he has treasured up his sorrows and despairs to make his literary stock in trade, has taken them to market, and squabbled with publishers and writhed under petty critics, and purred and bridled under judicious flattery; and we begin to resent his demand upon our sympathies. Are not poetry and art a terrible waste of energy in a world where so much energy is already being dissipated? The great musician, according to the well-worn anecdote, hears the people crying for bread in the street, and the wave of emotion passing through his mind comes out in the shape, not of active benevolence, but of some new and exquisite jangle of sounds. It is all very well. The musician, it is probable enough, could have done nothing better. But there are

times when we feel that we would rather have the actual sounds, the downright utterance of an agonised human being, than the far-away echo of passion set up in the artistic brain. We prefer the roar of the tempest to the squeaking of the Æolian harp. We tire of the skilfully prepared sentiment, the pretty fancies, the unreal imaginations, and long for the harsh, crude, substantial fact, the actual utterance of men struggling in the dire grasp of unmitigated realities. We want to see Nature itself, not to look at the distorted images presented in the magical mirror of a Shakespeare. The purpose of playing is, as that excellent authority is constantly made to repeat, to show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. But, upon that hypothesis, why should we not see the age itself instead of being bothered by impossible kings and queens and ghosts mixed up in supernatural catastrophes? If this theory of art be sound, is not the most realistic historian the only artist? Nay, since every historian is more or less a sophisticator, should we not go back to the materials from which histories are made?

I feel some touch of sympathy for those simple-minded readers who avowedly prefer the police reports to any other kind of literature. There at least they come into contact with solid facts; shocking, it may be, to well-regulated minds, but possessing all the charm of their brutal reality; not worked into the carefully doctored theories and rose-coloured pictures set forth by the judicious author, whose real aim is to pose as an amiable and interesting being. It is true that there are certain objections to such studies. They generally imply a wrong state of mind in the student. He too often reads, it is to be feared, with that pleasure in loathsome details which seems to spring from a survival of the old cruel instincts capable of finding pleasure in the sight of torture and bloodshed. Certainly one would not, even in a passing phrase, suggest that the indulgence of such a temper can

be anything but loathsome. But it is not necessary to assume this evil propensity in all cases; or what must be our judgment of the many excellent members of society who studied day by day the reports of the Tichborne case, for example, and felt that there was a real blank in their lives when the newspapers had to fill their columns with nothing better than discussions of international relations and social reforms? You might perhaps laugh at such a man if he asserted that he was conscientiously studying human nature. But you might give him credit if he replied that he was reading a novel which atoned for any defects of construction by the incomparable interest of reality. And the reply would be more plausible in defence of another kind of reading. When literature palls upon me I sometimes turn for relief to the great collection of State Trials. They are nothing, you may say, but the police reports of the past. But it makes all the difference that they are of the past. I may be ashamed of myself when I read some hideous revelation of modern crime, not to stimulate my ardour as a patriot and a reformer, but to add a zest to my comfortable chair in the club window or at the bar of my favourite public-house. But I can read without such a pang of remorse about Charles I. and the regicides. I can do nothing for them. I cannot turn the tide of battle at Naseby, or rush into the streets with the enthusiastic Venner. They make no appeal to me for help, and I have not to harden my heart by resisting, but only feel a sympathy which cannot be wasted because it could not be turned to account. I may indulge in it, for it strengthens the bond between me and my ancestors. My sense of relationship is stimulated and strengthened as I gaze at the forms sinking slowly beyond my grasp down into the abyss of the past, and try in imagination to raise them once more to the surface. I do all that I can for them in simply acknowledging that they form a part of the great process in which I am for the instant on the

knife-edge of actual existence, and unreal only in the sense in which the last motion of my pen is unreal now. "I was once," says one of the earliest performers, "a looker-on of the pageant as others be here now, but now, woe is me! I am a player in that doleful tragedy." This "now" is become our "once," and we may leave it to the harmless enthusiasts who play at metaphysics to explain or to darken the meaning of the familiar phrase. Whatever time may be—a point, I believe, not quite settled—there is always a singular fascination in any study which makes us vividly conscious of its ceaseless lapse, and gives us the sense of rolling back the ever-closing scroll. Historians, especially of the graphic variety, try to do that service for us; but we can only get the full enjoyment by studying at first hand direct contemporary reports of actual words and deeds.

The charm of the State Trials is in the singular fulness and apparent authenticity of many of the reports of *vivâ voce* examinations. There are not more links between us for example, and Sir Nicholas Throgmorton—whose words I have just quoted—than between us and the last witness at a contemporary trial. The very words are given fresh from the speaker's mouth. The volumes, of course, contain vast masses of the dismal materials which can be quarried only by the patience of a Dryasdust. If we open them at random we may come upon reading which is anything but exhilarating. There are pages upon pages of constitutional eloquence in the Sacheverell case about the blessed revolution, and the social compact, and the theory of passive resistance, which are as hopelessly unreadable as the last parliamentary debate in the "Times." If we chance upon the great case of Shipmoney, and the arguments for and against the immortal Hampden, we have to dig through strata of legal antiquarianism solid enough to daunt the most intrepid explorer. And, as trials expand in later times,

and the efforts of the British barrister to establish certain important rules of evidence become fully reported, we, as innocent laymen, feel bound to withdraw from the sacred place. Indeed, one is forced to ask in passing whether any English lawyer, with one exception, ever made a speech in court which it was possible for anyone not a lawyer to read in cold blood. Speeches, of course, have been made beyond number of admirable efficacy for the persuasion of judges and juries; but so far as the State Trials inform us, one can only suppose that lawyers regarded eloquence as a deadly sin, perhaps because jurymen had a kind of dumb instinct which led them to associate eloquence with humbug. The one exception is Erskine, whose speeches are true works of art, and perfect models of lucid exposition. The strangely inarticulate utterance of his brethren reconciles us in a literary sense to the rule—outrageous in a moral and political point of view—which for centuries forbade the assistance of counsel in the most serious cases. In the older trials, therefore, we assist at a series of tragedies which may shock our sense of justice, but in their rough-and-ready fashion go at once to the point and show us all the passions of human beings fighting in deadly earnest over the issues of life and death. The unities of time and place are strictly observed. In the good old days the jury, when once empanelled, had to go on to the end. There was no dilatory adjourning from day to day.[1] As wrestlers who have once taken hold must struggle till one touches earth, the prisoner had to finish his agony there and then. The case might go on by candlelight, and into the early hours of a second morning, till even the spectators, wedged together in the close court, with a

[1] In the trial of Horne Tooke in 1794 it was decided by the judges that an adjournment might take place in case of "physical necessity," but the only previous case of an adjournment cited was that of Canning (in 1753).

pestilential atmosphere, loaded, if they had only known it, with the germs of gaol fever, were well-nigh exhausted; till the judge confessed himself too faint to sum up, and even to recollect the evidence; till the unfortunate prisoner, browbeaten by the judge and the opposite counsel, bewildered by the legal subtleties, often surprised by unexpected evidence, and unable to produce contradictory witnesses at the instant, overwhelmed with all the labour and impossibility of a task to which he was totally unaccustomed, could only stammer out a vague assertion of innocence. Here and there some sturdy prisoner—a Throgmorton or a Lilburne—thus brought to bay under every disadvantage, managed to fight his way through, and to persuade a jury to let him off even at their own peril. As time goes on, things get better, and the professions of fair-play have more reality; but it is also true that the performance becomes less exciting. In the degenerate eighteenth century it came to be settled that a minister might be turned out of office without losing his head; and it is perhaps only from an æsthetic point of view that the old practice was better, which provided historians with so many moving stories of judicial tyranny. But in that point of view we may certainly prefer the old system, for the tragedies generally have a worthy ending; and instead of those sudden interventions of a benevolent author, which are meant to save our feelings, at the end of a modern novel, we are generally thrilled by a scene on the scaffold, in which it is rare indeed for the actors to play their parts unworthily.

The most interesting period of the State Trials is perhaps the last half of the seventeenth century, when the art of reporting seems to have been sufficiently developed to give a minute verbal record—vivid as a photograph—of the actual scene, and before the interest was diluted by floods of legal rhetoric. Pepys himself does not restore the past more vividly than do some of

those anonymous reporters. The records indeed of the trials give the fullest picture of a social period, which is too often treated from some limited point of view. The great political movements of the day leave their mark upon the trials; the last struggle of parties was fought out by judges and juries with whatever partiality in open court. We may start, if we please, with the "memorable scene" in which Charles I. won his title to martyrdom; then comes the gloomy procession of regicides; and presently we have the martyrs to the Popish Plot, and they are followed by the Whig martyr, Russell, and by the miserable victims who got the worst of Sedgemoor fight. The Church of England has its share of interest in the exciting case of the Seven Bishops; and Nonconformists are represented by Baxter's sufferings under Jeffreys, and by luckless frequenters of prohibited conventicles; and beneath the more stirring events described in different histories, we have strange glimpses of the domestic histories which were being transacted at the time; there are murderers and forgers and housebreakers, who cared little for Whig or Tory. Superstition is represented by an occasional case of witchcraft. And we have some curious illustrations of the manners and customs of the fast young men of the period, the dissolute noblemen, the "sons of Belial flown with insolence and wine," who disturbed Milton's meditations, and got upon the stage to see Nell Gwynn and Mrs. Bracegirdle in the comedies of Dryden and Etherege. It is unfair to take the reports of a police court as fully representing the characteristics of a time; but there never was a time which left a fuller impression of its idiosyncrasies in such an unsavoury Record Office. Let us pick up a case or two pretty much at random.

It is pleasantest, perhaps, to avoid the more familiar and pompous scenes. It is rather in the byplay—in the little vignettes of real life which turn up amidst more serious

events—that we may find the characteristic charm of the narrative. The trials, for example, of the regicides have an interest. They died for the most part (Hugh Peters seems to have been an exception) as became the survivors of the terrible Ironsides, glorying, till drums beat under the scaffold to silence them, in their fidelity to the "good old cause," and showing a stern front to the jubilant royalists. But one must admit that they show something, too, of the peculiarities which made the race tiresome to their contemporaries as they probably would be to us. They cannot submit without a wrangle—which they know to be futile—over some legal point, where simple submission to the inevitable would have been more dignified; and their dying prayers and orations are echoes of the long-winded sermons of the Blathergowls. They showed fully as much courage, but not so much taste, as the "royal actor" on the same scene. But amidst the trials there occurs here and there a fragment of picturesque evidence. A waterman tells us how he was walking about Whitehall on the morning of the "fatal blow." "Down came a file of musketeers." They hurried the hangman into his boat, and said, "Waterman, away with him; begone quickly." "So," says the waterman, "out I launched, and having got a little way in the water, says I, 'Who the devil have I got in my boat?' Says my fellow, says he, 'Why?' I directed my speech to him, saying, 'Are you the hangman that cut off the King's head?' 'No, as I am a sinner to God,' saith he, 'not I.' He shook, every joint of him. I knew not what to do. I rowed away a little farther, and fell to a new examination of him. 'Tell me true,' says I, 'are you the hangman that hath cut off the King's head? I cannot carry you,' said I. 'No,' saith he;" and explains that his instruments had been used, but not himself; and though the waterman threatened to sink his boat, the supposed hangman stuck to his story, and was presumably landed in safety. The evidence seems to be rather ambiguous as concerns the

prisoner, who was accused of being the actual executioner; but the vivacity with which Mr. Abraham Smith tells his story is admirable. Doubtless it had been his favourite anecdote to his fellows and his fares during the intervening years, and he felt, rightly as it has turned out, that this accidental contact with one of the great events of history would be his sole title to a kind of obscure immortality.

Another hero of that time, unfortunately a principal instead of a mere spectator in the recorded tragedy, is so full of exuberant vitality that we can scarcely reconcile ourselves to the belief that the poor man was hanged two centuries ago. The gallant Colonel Turner had served in the royal army, and, if we may believe his dying words, was specially valued by his Majesty. The colonel, however, got into difficulties: he made acquaintance with a rich old merchant named Tryon, and tried to get a will forged in his favour by one of Tryon's clerks; failing in this, he decided upon speedier measures. He tied down poor old Tryon in his bed one night, and then carried off jewels to the value of 3,000*l*. An energetic alderman suspected the colonel, clutched him a day or two afterwards, and forced him to disgorge. When put upon his defence, he could only tell one of those familiar fictions common to pickpockets; how he had accidentally collared the thief, who had transferred the stolen goods to him, and how he was thus entitled to gratitude instead of punishment. It is not surprising that the jury declined to believe him; but we are almost surprised that any judge had the courage to sentence him. For Colonel Turner is a splendid scoundrel. There is something truly heroic in his magnificent self-complacency; the fine placid glow of conscious virtue diffused over his speeches. He is a link between Dugald Dalgetty, Captain Bobadil, and the audacious promoter of some modern financiering scheme. Had he lived in days when old merchants invest their savings in shares instead of diamonds, he would have been an invaluable director

of a bubble company. There is a dash of the Pecksniff about him; but he has far too much pith and courage to be dashed like that miserable creature by a single exposure. Old Chuzzlewit would never have broken loose from his bonds. It is delightful to see, in days when most criminals prostrated themselves in abject humiliation, how this splendid colonel takes the Lord Chief Justice into his confidence, verbally buttonholes "my dear lord" with a pleasant assumption that, though for form's sake some inquiry might be necessary, every reasonable man must see the humour of an accusation directed against so innocent a patriot. The whole thing is manifestly absurd. And then the colonel gracefully slides in little compliments to his own domestic virtues. Part of his story had to be that he had sent his wife (who was accused as an accomplice) on an embassy to recover the stolen goods. "I sent my poor wife away," he says, "and, saving your lordship's presence, she did all bedirt herself—a thing she did not use to do, poor soul. She found this Nagshead, she sat down, being somewhat fat and weary, poor heart! I have had twenty-seven children by her, fifteen sons and twelve daughters." "Seven or eight times this fellow did round her." "Let me give that relation," interrupts the wife. "You cannot," replies the colonel, "it is as well. Prythee, sit down, dear Moll; sit thee down, good child, all will be well." And so the colonel proceeds with amazing volubility, and we sympathise with this admirable father of twenty-seven children under so cruel a hardship. But—not to follow the trial—the colonel culminated under the most trying circumstances. His dying speech is superb. He is honourably confessing his sins, but his natural instinct asserts itself. He cannot but admit, in common honesty, that he is a model character, and speaks under his gallows as if he were the good apprentice just arrived at the mayoralty. He admits, indeed, that he occasionally gave way to swearing, though

he "hated and loathed" the sin when he observed it; but he was—it was the source of all his troubles—of a "hasty nature." But he was brought up in an honest family in the good old times, and laments the bad times that have since come in. He has been a devoted loyalist; he has lived civilly and honestly at the upper end of Cheapside as became a freeman of the Company of Drapers; he was never known to be "disguised in drink;" a small cup of cider in the morning, and two little glasses of sack and one of claret at dinner, were enough for him; he was a constant churchgoer, and of such delicate propriety of behaviour that he never "saw a man in church with his hat on but it troubled him very much" (a phrase which reminds us of Johnson's famous friend); "there must be," he is sure, when he thinks of all his virtues, "a thousand sorrowful souls and weeping eyes" for him this day. The attendant clergy are a little scandalised at this peculiar kind of penitence; and he is good enough to declare that he "disclaims any desert of his own"—a sentiment which we feel to be a graceful concession, but not to be too strictly interpreted. The hangman is obliged to put the rope round his neck. "*Dost thou mean to choke me, fellow?*" exclaims the indignant colonel. "What a simple fellow is this! how long have you been executioner that you know not how to put the knot?" He then utters some pious ejaculations, and as he is assuming the fatal cap, sees a lady at a window; he kisses his hand to her, and says, "Your servant, Mistress;" and so pulling down the cap, the brave colonel vanishes, as the reporter tells us, with a very undaunted carriage to his last breath.

Sir Thomas More with his flashes of playfulness, or Charles with his solemn "Remember," could scarcely play their parts more gallantly than Colonel Turner, and they had the advantage of a belief in the goodness of their cause. Perhaps it is illogical to sympathise all the more with poor Colonel Turner, because we know that

his courage had not the adventitious aid of a good conscience. But surely he was a very prince of burglars! We turn a page and come to a very different question of casuistry. Law and morality are at a deadlock. Instead of the florid, swaggering cavalier, we have a pair of Quakers, Margaret Fell, and the famous George Fox, arguing with the most irritating calmness and logic against the imposition of an oath. "Give me the book in my hand," says Fox; and they are all gazing in hopes that he is about to swear. Then he holds up the Bible and exclaims, "This book commands me not to swear." To which dramatic argument (the report, it is to be observed, comes from Fox's side) there is no possible reply but to "pluck the book forth of his hand again," and send him back to prison. The Quakers vanish in their invincible passiveness; and in the next page we find ourselves at Bury St. Edmunds. The venerated Sir Matthew Hale is on the bench, and the learned and eloquent Sir Thomas Browne appears in the witness-box. They listen to a wretched story of two poor old women accused of bewitching children. The children swear that they have been tormented by imps, in the shape of flies, which flew into their mouths with crooked pins—the said imps being presumably the diabolical emissaries of the witches. Then Sir Thomas Browne gravely delivers his opinion; he quotes a case of witchcraft in Denmark, and decides, after due talk about "superabundant humours" and judicious balancing of conflicting considerations, that the fits into which the children fell were strictly natural, but "heightened to a great excess by the subtlety of the devil co-operating with the malice of the witches." An "ingenious person," however, suggests an experiment. The child who had sworn that the touch of the witch threw her into fits, was blindfolded and touched by another person passed off as the witch. The young sinner fell into the same fits, and the "ingenious person" pronounced

the whole affair to be an imposture. However, a more ingenious person gets up and proves by dexterous logic, curiously like that of a detected "medium" of to-day, that, on the contrary, it confirms the evidence.[1] Whereupon the witches were found guilty, the judge and all the court being fully satisfied with the verdict, and were hanged accordingly, though absolutely refusing to confess.

Our ancestors' justice strikes us as rather heavy-handed and dull-eyed on these occasions. In another class of trials we see the opposite phase—the manifestation of that curious tenderness which has shown itself in so many forms since the days when highway robbery appeared to be a graceful accomplishment if practised by a wild Prince and Poins. Things were made delightfully easy in the race which flourished after the Restoration. Every Peer, by the amazing privilege of the "benefit of clergy," had a right to commit one manslaughter. Like a schoolboy, he was allowed to plead "first fault;" and a good many Peers took advantage of the system.

Lord Morley, for example, has a quarrel "about half-a-crown." A Mr. Hastings, against whom he has some previous grudge, contemptuously throws down four half-crowns. Therefore Lord Morley and an attendant bully insult Hastings, assault him repeatedly, and at last fall upon him "just under the arch in Lincoln's Inn Fields," and there Lord Morley stabs him to death, "with a desperate imprecation." The Attorney-General argues that this shows malice, and urges that Mr. Hastings, too, was a man of good family. But the Peers only find their fellow guilty of manslaughter. He claims his privilege, and is dismissed with a benevolent admonition not to do

[1] This case was in 1665. It is curious that in the case of Hathaway, in 1702, a precisely similar experiment convinced everybody that the accuser was an impostor; and got him a whipping and a place in the pillory.

it again. Elsewhere, we have Lord Cornwallis and a friend coming out of Whitehall in the early morning, drunk and using the foulest language. After trying in vain to quarrel with a sentinel, they swear that they will kill somebody before going home. An unlucky youth comes home to his lodgings close by, and after some abuse from the Peer and his friend, the lad is somehow tumbled downstairs and killed on the spot. As it seems not to be clear whether Lord Cornwallis gave the fatal kick, he is honourably acquitted. Then we have a free fight at a tavern, where Lord Pembroke is drinking with a lot of friends. One of them says that he is as good a gentleman as Lord Pembroke. The witnesses were all too drunk to remember how and why anything happened; but after a time one of them is kicked out of the tavern; another, a Mr. Cony, is knocked down and trampled, and swears that he has received what turned out some days later to be mortal injuries from the boots of Lord Pembroke. The case is indeed doubtful; for the doctor who was called in refused to make a post-mortem examination on the ground that it might lead him into "a troublesome matter;" and another was disposed to attribute the death to poor Mr. Cony's inordinate love of "cold small beer." He drank three whole tankards the night before his death; and when actually dying, declined "white wine posset drink," suggested by the doctor, and "swore a great oath he would have small beer." And so he died, whether by boots or beer; and the Lord High Steward in due time had to inform Lord Pembroke that his lordship was guilty of manslaughter but, being entitled to his clergy, was to be discharged on paying his fees. The most sinister figure amongst these wild gallants is the Lord Mohun, who killed, and was killed by, the Duke of Hamilton, as all the readers of the "Journals" of Swift or of "Colonel Esmond" remember. He appears twice in the collection. On December 9, 1690, Mohun and his

friend Colonel Hill came swaggering into the play-house, and got from the pit upon the stage. An attendant asks them to pay for their places; whereupon Lord Mohun nobly refuses, saying, "If you bring any of your masters I will slit their noses." The pair have a coach-and-six waiting in the street to carry off Mrs. Bracegirdle, to whom Hill has been making love. As she is going home to supper, they try to force her into it with the help of half-a-dozen soldiers. The bystanders prevent this; but the pair insist upon seeing Mrs. Bracegirdle to her house, and mount guard outside with their swords drawn. Mrs. Bracegirdle and her friends stand listening at the door, and hear them vowing vengeance against Mountford, of whom Hill was jealous. Presently the watch appears—the constable and the beadle, and a man in front with a lantern. The constable asks why are the swords drawn. Mrs. Bracegirdle through the door hears Mohun reply, "I am a Peer of England, touch me if you dare." "God bless your honour," replies the constable, "I know not what you are, but I hope you are doing no harm." "No," said he. "You may knock me down, if you please," adds Colonel Hill. "Nay, said I" (the lantern-bearer), "we never use to knock gentlemen down unless there be occasion." And the judicious watch retire to a tavern in the next street, in order, as they say, "to examine what they (Mohun and Hill) were, and what they were doing." There was, as the constable explains, "a drawer there, who had formerly lived over against him," and might throw some light upon the proceedings of these polite gentlemen. But, alas! "in the meantime the murder was done." For as another witness tells us, Mr. Mountford came up the street and was speaking coolly to Mohun, when Hill came up behind and gave him a box on the ear. "Saith Mr. Mountford, what's that for? And with that he (Hill) whipped out his sword and made a pass at him, and I turned about and cried

murder!" Mountford was instantly killed; but witnesses peeping through doors, and looking out of windows, gave conflicting accounts of the scuffle in the dim street, and Lord Mohun, after much argument as to the law, was acquitted. Five years later, he appears in the case reported by Esmond, with little more than a change in the names. An insensate tavern-brawl is followed by an adjournment to Leicester Fields; six noblemen and gentlemen in chairs; Mr. Coote, the chief actor in the quarrel, urging his chairman by threatening to goad him with his sword. The gentlemen get over the railings and vanish into the "dark wet" night, whilst the chairmen philosophically light their pipes. The pipes are scarcely alight, when there is a cry for help. Somehow a chair is hoisted over the rails, and poor Mr. Coote is found prostrate in a pool of blood. The chairmen strongly object to spoiling their chairs by putting a "bloody man" into them. They are pacified by a promise of 100*l.* security; but the chair is somehow broken, and the watch will not come to help, because it is out of their ward; "and I staid half-an-hour," says the chief witness pathetically, "with my chair broken, and afterwards I was laid hold upon, both I and my partner, and kept till next night at eleven o'clock; and that is all the satisfaction I have had for my chair and everything." This damage to the chair was clearly the chief point of interest for poor Robert Browne, the chairman, and it may be feared that his account is still unsettled. Mohun escaped upon this occasion, and, indeed, Esmond is unjust in giving to him a principal part in the tragedy.

Such were the sights to be seen occasionally in London by the watchman's lantern or the candle glimmering across the narrow alley, or some occasional lamp swinging across the street; for it was by such a lamp that a girl looked into the hackney coach and saw the face of a man who had sent for Dr. Clench ostensibly to visit

a patient, but really in order to strangle the poor doctor on the way. These are strange illuminations on the margin of the pompous page of official history; and the incidental details give form and colour to the incidents in Pepys' "Journals" or Grammont's "Memoirs." We have kept at a distance from the more dignified records of the famous constitutional struggles which fill the greatest number of pages. Yet those pages are not barren for the lover of the picturesque. And here I must put in a word for one much reviled character. If ever I were to try my hand at the historical amusement of white-washing, I should be tempted to take for my hero the infamous Jeffreys. He was, I dare say, as bad as he is painted; so perhaps were Nero and Richard III., and other much-abused persons; but no miscreant of them all could be more amusing. Wherever the name of Jeffreys appears we may be certain of good sport. With all his inexpressible brutality, his buffoonery, his baseness, we can see that he was a man of remarkable talent. We think of him generally as he appeared when bullying Baxter; when "he snorted and squeaked, blew his nose and clenched his hands, and lifted up his eyes, mimicking their (the Nonconformists') manner, and running on furiously, as he said they used to pray;" and we may regard him as his victims must have regarded him, as a kind of demoniacal baboon placed on the bench in robes and wig, in hideous caricature of justice. But the vigour and skill of the man when he has to worry the truth out of a stubborn witness is also amazing. When a knavish witness produced a forged deed in support of the claim of a certain Lady Ity to a great part of Shadwell, Jeffreys is in his element. He is perhaps a little too exuberant. "Ask him what questions you will," he breaks out, "but if he should swear as long as Sir John Falstaff fought" (the Chief Justice can quote Shakespeare), "I would never believe a word he says." His lordship may be too

violent, but he is substantially doing justice; and shows himself a dead hand at unmasking a cheat. The most striking proof of Jeffreys' power is in the dramatic trial of Lady Lisle. The poor lady was accused of harbouring one Hicks, a Dissenting preacher, after Sedgemoor. It was clear that a certain James Dunne had guided Hicks to Lady Lisle's house. The difficulty was to prove that Lady Lisle knew Hicks to be a traitor. Dunne had talked to her in presence of another witness, and it was suggested that he had given her the fatal information. But Dunne tried hard in telling his story to sink this vital fact. The effort of Jeffreys to twist it out of poor Dunne, and Dunne's futile and prolonged wriggling to escape the confession, are reported at full, and form one of the most striking passages in the "State Trials." Jeffreys shouts at him; dilates in most edifying terms upon the bottomless lake of fire and brimstone which awaits all perjurers; snatches at any slip; pins the witness down; fastens inconsistencies upon him through page after page; but poor Dunne desperately clutches the secret in spite of the tremendous strain. He almost seems to have escaped, when the other witness establishes the fact that some conversation took place. Armed with this new thumbscrew, Jeffreys leaps upon poor Dunne again. The storm of objurgations, appeals, confutations, bursts forth with increased force; poor Dunne slips into a fatal admission; he has admitted some talk, but cannot explain what it was. He tries dogged silence. The torture of Jeffreys' tongue urges him to fresh blundering. A candle is held up to his nose that the court "may see his brazen face." At last he exclaims, the candle "still nearer to his nose," and feeling himself the very focus of all attention, "I am quite cluttered out of my senses; I do not know what I say." The wretched creature is allowed to reflect for a time, and then at last declares that he will tell the truth. He tells enough in fact for the purpose, though he feebly tries to

keep back the most damning words. Enough has been wrenched out of him to send poor Lady Lisle to the scaffold. The figure of the poor old lady falling asleep, as it is said, while Jeffreys' thunder and lightning was raging in this terrific fashion round the feeble defence of Dunne's reticence, is so pathethic, and her fate so piteous and disgraceful, that we have little sense for anything but Jeffreys' brutality. But if the power of worming the truth out of a grudging witness were the sole test of a judge's excellence, we must admit the amazing efficiency of Jeffreys' method. He is the ideal cross-examiner, and we may overlook the cruelty to victims who have so long ceased to suffer.

In the post-revolutionary period the world becomes more merciful and duller. Lawyers speak at greater length; and even the victims of '45, the strange Lord Lovat himself, give little sport at the respectable bar of the House of Lords. But the domestic trials become perhaps more interesting, if only by way of commentary upon "Tom Jones" or "Roderick Random." Novelists indeed have occasionally sought to turn these records to account. The great Annesley case has been used by Mr. Charles Reade, and Scott took some hints from it in one of the very best of his performances, the inimitable "Guy Mannering." Scott's adaptation should, indeed, be rather a warning than a precedent; for the surpassing merit of his great novel consists in the display of character, in Meg Merrilies and Dandie Dinmont and Counsellor Pleydell, and certainly not in the rather childish plot with the long-lost heir business. He falls into the common error of supposing that the actual occurrence of events must be a sufficient guarantee for employing them in fiction. The Annesley case is almost the only one in the collection in which facts descend to the level of romance. The claimant's case was clearly established up to a certain point. There was no doubt that he had passed for Lord

Annesley's son in his childhood; that he had for that reason been spirited away by his uncle, and sold as a slave in America; and, further, that when he returned to make his claim and killed a man by accident (an incident used by Scott)—his uncle did his best to have him convicted for murder. The more difficult point was to prove that he was the legitimate son of the deceased lord by his wife, who was also dead. A servant of the supposed mother gave evidence which, if true conclusively disproved this assumption; and though young Annesley won his first trial, he afterwards failed to convict this witness of perjury. The case may therefore be still doubtful, though the weight of evidence seems decidedly against the claimant. The case—the "longest ever known" at that time—lasted fifteen days, and gives some queer illustrations of the domestic life of a disreputable Irish nobleman of the period. Perhaps, however, the most curious piece of evidence is given by the attorney who was employed to prosecute the claimant for a murder of which he was clearly innocent. "What was the intention of the prosecution?" he is asked. "To put this man out of the way that he (Lord Anglesea, the uncle) might enjoy the estate easy and quiet." "You understood, then, that Lord Anglesea would give 10,000*l.* to get the plaintiff hanged!" "I did." "Did you not apprehend that to be a most wicked crime?" "I did." "If so, how could you engage in that project, without making any objection to it?" "I may as well ask you," is the reply, "how you came to be engaged in this suit." He is afterwards asked whether any honest man would do such an action. "Yes, I believe they would, or else I would not have carried it on." This is one of the prettiest instances on record of that ingenious adaptation of the conscience, which allows a man to think himself thoroughly honest for committing a most wicked crime in his professional

capacity. The novelist who wishes rather to display character than to amuse us with intricacies of plot, will find more matter in less ambitious narratives. A most pathetic romance, which may remind us of more famous fictions, underlies the great murder case in which Cowper, the poet's grandfather, was defendant. Sarah Stout, the daughter of a Quaker at Hertford, fell desperately in love with Cowper, who was a barrister, and sometimes lodged at her father's house when on circuit. She wrote passionate letters to him of the "Eloisa to Abelard" kind, which Cowper was ultimately forced to produce in evidence. He therefore had a final interview with her, explained to her the folly of her passion, there being already a Mrs. Cowper, and left her late in the evening to go to his lodgings elsewhere. Poor Sarah Stout rushed out in despair and threw herself into the Priory river. There she was found dead next morning, when the miller came to pull up his sluices. All the gossips of Hertford came immediately to look at the body and make moral or judicial reflections upon the facts. Wiseacres suggested that Cowper was the last man seen in her company, and it came out that two or three other men attending the assizes had gossiped about her on the previous evening, and one of them had, strange to relate, left a cord close by his trunk. These facts, transfigured by the Hertford imagination, became the nucleus of a theory, set forth in delicious legal verbosity, that the said Cowper, John Masson, and others "a certain rope of no value about the neck of the said Sarah, then and there feloniously, voluntarily, and of malice aforethought did put, place, fix, and bind; and the neck and throat of the said Sarah, then and there with the hands of you, the said Cowper, Masson, Stephens, and Rogers, feloniously, voluntarily, and of your malice aforethought, did hold, squeeze, and gripe." By the said squeezing and griping, to abbreviate a little, Sarah Stout was choked

and strangled; and being choked and strangled instantly died, and was then secretly and maliciously put and cast into the river. The evidence, it is plain, required a little straining, but then Cowper belonged to the great Whig family of the town, and Sarah Stout was a Quaker. Tories thought it would be well to get a Cowper hanged, and Quakers wished to escape the imputation that one of their sect had committed suicide. The trial lasted so long that the poor judge became faint and confessed that he could not sum up properly. The whole strength of the case, however, such as it was, depended upon an ingenious theory set up by the prosecution, to the effect that the bodies of the drowned always sink, whereas Miss Stout was found floating, and must therefore have been dead before she was put in the river. The chief witness was a sailor, who swore that this doctrine as to sinking and swimming was universal in the navy. He had seen the shipwreck of the "Coronation" in 1691. "We saw the ship sink down," he says, "and they swam up and down like a shoal of fish one over another, and I see them hover one upon another, and see them drop away by scores at a time;" some nine escaped, "but there were no more saved out of the ship's complement, which was between 500 and 600, and the rest I saw sinking downright, twenty at a time." He has a clinching argument, though a less graphic instance, to prove that men already dead do not sink. "Otherwise, why should Government be at that vast charge to allow threescore or fourscore weight of iron to sink every man, but only that their swimming about should not be a discouragement to others?" Cowper's scientific witnesses, some of the medical bigwigs of the day, had very little trouble in confuting this evidence; but the letters which he at last produced, and the evidence that poor Miss Stout had been talking of suicide, should have made the whole story clear even to the bemuddled judges. The

novelist would throw into the background this crowd of gossiping and malicious *quidnuncs* of Hertford; but we must be content to catch glimpses of her previous history from these absurdly irrelevant twaddlings, as in actual life we catch sight of tragedies below the surface of social small-talk. Sarah Stout was clearly a Maggie Tulliver, a potential heroine, unable to be happy amidst the broad-brimmed, drab-coated respectabilities of quiet little Hertford. Her rebellion was rasher than Maggie's, but perhaps in a more characteristic fashion. The case suggests the wish that Mr. Stephen Guest might have been hanged on some such suspicion as was nearly fatal to Cowper.

Half a century later our ancestors were in a state of intense excitement about another tragedy of a darker kind. Mary Blandy, the only daughter of a gentleman at Henley, made acquaintance with a Captain Cranstoun, who was recruiting in the town. The father objected to a marriage from a suspicion, apparently well founded, that Cranstoun was already married in Scotland. Thereupon Mary Blandy administered to her father certain powders sent to her by Cranstoun. According to her own account, she intended them as a kind of charm to act upon her father's affections. As they were, in fact, composed of arsenic, they soon put an end to her father altogether, and it is too clear that she really knew what she was doing. It was sworn that she used brutal and unfeeling language about the poor old man's sufferings, for the poison was given at intervals during some months. But the pathetic touch which moved the sympathies of contemporaries was the behaviour of the father. In the last day or two of his life, he was told that his daughter had been the cause of his fatal illness. His comment was: "Poor love-sick girl! What will not a woman do for the man she loves!" When she came to his room his only thought was apparently to

comfort her. His most reproachful phrase was: "Thee should have considered better than to have attempted anything against thy father." The daughter went down on her knees and begged him not to curse her. "I curse thee!" he exclaimed. "My dear, how couldst thou think I should curse thee? No, I bless thee, and hope God will bless thee and amend thy life." And then he added, "Do, my dear, go out of the room and say no more, lest thou shouldst say anything to thy prejudice; go to thy uncle Stevens, take him for thy friend; poor man, I am sorry for him." The tragedy behind these homely words is almost too pathetic and painful for dramatic purposes; and it is not strange that our ancestors were affected. The sympathy, however, took the queer illogical twist which perhaps, who can tell? it might do at the present day. Miss Blandy became a sort of *quasi* saint, the tenderness due to the murdered man extended itself to his murderer, and her penitence profoundly edified all observers. Crowds of people flocked to see her in chapel, and she accepted the homage gracefully. She was extremely shocked, we are told, by one insinuation made by uncharitable persons; namely, that her intimacy with Cranstoun, who was supposed to be a freethinker, might justify doubts upon her orthodoxy. She declared that he had always talked to her "perfectly in the style of a Christian," and she had read the works of some of our most celebrated divines. In spite of her moving conduct, however, the "prejudices she had to struggle with had taken too deep root in some men's minds" to allow of her getting a pardon. And so, 5,000 people saw poor Miss Blandy mount the ladder in "a black bombazine, short sack and petticoat," on an April morning at Oxford, and many, "particularly several gentlemen of the University," were observed to shed tears. She left a declaration of innocence which, in spite of its solemnity, must have

been a lie; and which contained an allusion from which it appears that Miss Blandy, like other prisoners, was suspected of previous crimes.

"It is shocking to think," says Horace Walpole, in noticing Miss Blandy's case, "what a shambles this country has become. Seventeen were executed this morning, after having murdered the turnkey on Friday night, and almost forced open Newgate." Another woman was hanged in the same year for murdering her uncle at Walthamstow; and the public could talk about nothing but the marriage of the Miss Gunnings and the hanging of two murderesses. Fielding, then approaching the end of his career, was moved by this and other atrocities to publish a queer collection of instances of the providential punishment of murderers. Another famous author of the day was commonly said to have turned a famous murder to account in a different fashion. Foote, it is said, was introduced at a club in the words, "This is the nephew of the gentleman who was lately hung in chains for murdering his brother;" and it is added that Foote's first pamphlet was an account of this disagreeable domestic incident. A more serious author might have found in it materials for a striking narrative. Captain Goodere commanded his Majesty's ship "Ruby," lying in the King's Road off Bristol. He had a quarrel with his brother Sir John Goodere, about a certain estate. The family solicitor arranged a meeting in his house, where the two brothers appeared to be reconciled. But Sir John had scarcely left the house, when he was seized in broad daylight by a set of sailors who had been drinking in a public-house, and carried down forcibly to the Captain's barge. The Captain himself followed and rowed off with his brother to the ship. There Sir John was confined in a cabin, a suggestion being thrown out to the crew that he was a madman. A few hours later, one Mahony, who played the part of "hairy-faced Dick" to Hamilton Tighe,

strangled the unfortunate man, with an accomplice called White. Attention had been aroused amongst the crew by ominous sounds, groans, and scufflings heard in the dead of the night, and next morning, the lieutenant, after a talk with the surgeon, resolved to seize their captain for murder. A more outrageous and reckless proceeding, indeed, could scarcely have been imagined even in the days when a pressgang was a familiar sight, and the captain of a ship at sea was as absolute as an Eastern despot. Every detail seemed to be arranged with an express view to publicity. One piece of evidence, however, was required to bring the matter home to the captain; and it is of ghastly picturesqueness. The ship's cooper and his wife were sleeping in the cabin next to the scene of the murder. The cooper had heard the poor man exclaim that he was going to be murdered, and praying that the murder might come to light. This, however, seemed to be the wandering of a madman, and the cooper went to sleep. Presently his wife called him up: "I believe they are murdering the gentleman." He heard broken words and saw a light glimmering through a crevice in the partition. Peeping through he could distinguish the two ruffians, standing with a candle over the dead body and taking a watch from a pocket. And then, through the gloom, he made out a hand upon the throat of the victim. The owner of the hand was invisible; but it was whiter than that of a common sailor. "I have often seen Mahony's and White's hands," he added, "and I thought the hand was whiter than either of theirs." The trembling cooper wanted to leave the cabin, but his wife held him back, as, indeed, with three murderers in the dark passage outside, it required some courage to move. So they watched trembling, till he heard a sentinel outside, and thought himself safe at last: he roused the doctor, peeped at the dead body through a "scuttle" which opened into the cabin; and then urged the lieutenant

to seize the captain. The captain was deservedly hanged, bequeathing to us that ghastly Rembrandt-like picture of the white hand seen through the crevice by the trembling cooper on the throat of the murdered man. There is no touch which appeals so forcibly to the imagination in De Quincey's famous narrative of the Mar murders.

I have made but a random selection from the long gallery of grim and grotesque portraiture of the less reputable of our ancestry. It must be confessed that a first impression tends to reconcile us to the comfortable creed of progress. The eighteenth century had some little defects which have been frequently expounded; but it can certainly afford to show courts of justice against its predecessor. The old judicial murder of the Popish Plot variety has become extinct; if the judges try to strain the law of libel, for example, the prisoner has every chance of making a good fight; for which the readers of Horne Tooke's gallant defences, and of some of Erskine's speeches, may be duly grateful. The ancient brag of fair play has become something of a reality. And the character of the crimes has changed in a noticeable way. There are hideous crimes enough. A brutal murder by smugglers near the case of Mary Blandy surpasses in its barbarity the worst of modern agrarian outrages; though it is not clear that in number of horrors the present century is unable to match its predecessor. When the wild blood of the Byrons shows itself in the last of the old tavern brawls à la Mohun, we feel that it is a case (in modern slang) of a "survival." The poet's grand-uncle, the wicked Lord Byron, got into a quarrel with Mr. Chaworth about the game laws at a dinner of country gentlemen at the Star and Garter; whereupon, in an ambiguous affair, half scuffle and half duel, Byron sent his sword through Chaworth's body, and then politely requested Mr. Chaworth to admit that he (Byron) was as brave a man as any in the Kingdom. But this little

ebullition required Byronic impulsiveness, and was not a recognised part of a gentleman's conduct. Lord Ferrers, a short time before, was hanged, to the admiration of all men, like a common felon, for shooting his own steward; whereas in our day, he would almost certainly have escaped on the plea of insanity. Other cases mark the advent of the meddlesome, but perhaps on the whole useful person, the social reformer. Momentary gleams of light, for example, are thrown upon the scandals which ruined the trade of the parsons of the Fleet. Poor Miss Pleasant Rawlins is arrested for an imaginary debt, carried to a sponging-house, and there persuaded (she was only seventeen or thereabouts) that she could obtain her liberty by an immediate marriage to an adventurer who had scraped acquaintance with her and taken a liking to her fortune. The famous (he was once famous) Beau Fielding falls into a trap unworthy of an experienced man of the world. He is persuaded that a lady of fortune has fallen in love with him on seeing him walking in her grounds at a distance. A lady, by no means of fortune, comes to his lodgings, and passes herself off as this susceptible person. Hereupon Fielding sends off for a priest of one of the foreign embassies, gets himself married at his lodgings the same evening, and discovers a few days afterwards that he is married to the wrong person. It is exactly a comedy of the period performed by real flesh and blood actors. The catastrophe is painful. Mr. Fielding ventures to grant himself a divorce, and to marry the wretched old Duchess of Cleveland; and in due time the Duchess finds it very convenient to have him tried for bigamy. It did not take more than half a century or so of such scandals to get an improvement in the marriage law, which implies, on the whole, a creditable rate of progress. Another set of cases illustrates a grievance familiar to novel-readers. In "Amelia" the atrocities of bailiffs, sponging-houses and

debtors' prisons are drawn with startling realism. We may easily convince ourselves that Fielding was not speaking without book. The bailiff who has arrested Captain Booth gives a "wipe or two with his hanger," as he pleasantly expresses it, to an unlucky wretch who gives trouble, and delivers an admirable discourse upon the ethics of killing in such cases. It might have come from the mouth of one Tranter, a bailiff, who, a few years before, had stabbed poor Captain Luttrell, for objecting to leave his wife in a delicate state of health. Soon after, we find a society of philanthropists headed by Oglethorpe of "strong benevolence of soul," endeavouring to expose the horrors of the Fleet and the Marshalsea. A series of trials, ordered by the House of Commons, had the ending too characteristic of all such movements. Witnesses swore to atrocities enough to make one's blood run cold—of men guilty only of impecuniosity, half-starved, thrust naked into loathsome and pestiferous dungeons, beaten and chained, and persecuted to death. But then arise another set of unimpeachable witnesses, who swear with equal vigour that the unfortunate debtors were treated with every consideration; that they were made as comfortable as their mutinous spirit would allow; that they were discharged in good health and died months afterwards from entirely different causes; that the accused were not the responsible authorities; that they had never interfered except from kindness, and that they were the humanest and best of mankind. Nothing remained but an acquittal; though the investigation did something towards letting daylight into abodes of horror which Mr. Pickwick found capable of improvement a century later.

Other cases might show how in various ways the strange power called Public Opinion was beginning to increase its capricious and desultory influence. The strange case of Elizabeth Canning (1753) is one of the most picturesque in the collection. Miss Canning was a

maid-servant, who disappeared for a month, and coming home told how she had been kidnapped by a gipsy and finally escaped. Officious neighbours rushed in, and by judicious leading questions managed to help her to manufacture evidence against a poor old gipsy woman, preternaturally hideous, who sat smoking her pipe in blank wonder as the crowd of virtuous avengers of innocence rushed into her kitchen. Mary Squires, the gipsy, was sentenced to be hanged, and doubtless at an earlier period she would have been turned off without delay. But in that delicious calm in the middle of the last century, when wars, and rebellions, and constitutional agitations were quiet for the moment, and people had time to read their modest newspapers without spoiling their digestions and their nerves, the case aroused the popular interest. If the news did not flash through the country as rapidly as that of the Lefroy murder, it slowly dribbled along the post-roads and set people gossiping in ale-houses far away in quiet country villages. A whole host of witnesses appeared and proved an *alibi* by giving a diary of a gipsy's tour. We follow the party to village dances; we hear the venerable piece of scandal about the schoolmaster who "got fuddled" with the gipsies; and what the gipsies had for dinner on January 1, 1753, and how they paid their bill; we have a glimpse of the little flirtation carried on by the gipsy's daughter, and the poor trembling little letter is produced, which she managed to write to her lover, and which cost her sevenpence; threepence being charged for it from Basingstoke to London, and fourpence from London to Dorchester. After more than a week spent in overhauling this and other evidence, proving amongst other things that the scene of the girl's supposed confinement was really tenanted the whole time by a man strangely and most inappropriately named Fortune Natus, the jury decided that the accuser was guilty of perjury, but boggled

characteristically as to its being "wilful and corrupt." However, Elizabeth Canning got her deserts and was transported to New England, still sticking to the truth of her story. Her guilt is plain enough, if anybody could care about it, but the little details of English country life a century ago are as fresh as the doings of the rustics in one of Mr. Hardy's novels.

It all happened a long time ago, but we cannot hope with the old lady who made that consolatory remark about other historical narratives that "it ain't none of it true." On the contrary such vivid little pictures flash out upon us as we read that we have a difficulty in supposing that they were not taken yesterday. Abundance of morals may be drawn by historians and others who deal in that kind of ware: it is enough here to have indicated, as well as we can, what pleasant reading may be found in the dusty old volumes which are too often left to repose undisturbed on the repulsive shelves of a lawyer's library.

COLERIDGE[1]

In the period which intervened between the Great War and the first Reform Bill, there were two centres of intellectual light in England. Jeremy Bentham, in his cheerful old age, reached his eightieth birthday in 1828, still, as he phrased it, codifying like any dragon, solving all problems by the application of his famous formula about the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and adding day by day to the vast piles of manuscript which were to embody the principles of all future legislation. To his hermitage in Westminster were admitted a little group of chosen disciples, the stern political economists, rigid utilitarians, and energetic reformers, some of whom were in the coming years to assume the title of philosophical radicals. Another band of enthusiasts sought a different shrine. They listened to an oracle which taught them that utilitarianism was "moral anarchy," political economy a "solemn humbug," radicalism the direct road to ruin, and true wisdom only to be found in regions of contemplation which Bentham could never enter—for a

[1] A lecture delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, 9th March, 1888. It seems desirable to say that some of the statements in the Lecture rest upon an examination of original documents, many of which have not hitherto been accessible to biographers. I owe my acquaintance with them chiefly to Mr. Dykes Campbell, whose knowledge of the subject is most minute and exhaustive. A complete biography still remains to be written; it may be expected from Mr. Ernest Coleridge, who is in possession of a great mass of his grandfather's papers.

reason analogous to that which forbids pachydermatous quadrupeds to soar into the empyrean. We know pretty well what was the manner of man at whose feet these disciples sat. The keenest of contemporary observers has left a picture which must be laid under contribution for every description of Coleridge. Carlyle saw an old man—though in point of actual years he was Bentham's junior by nearly a quarter of a century—with the brow of a philosopher and the eye of a poet, but with the irresolute flabby mouth of a sensuous dreamer of dreams, consuming cups of tea, lukewarm but better than he deserved, or strolling, corkscrew fashion, along both sides of a garden path, unable to make up his mind to either. You put him a question; he replied by accumulating "formidable apparatus, logical swim-bladders, transcendental life-preservers, and other precautionary and vehiculatory gear for setting out;" but rambled into the universe at large, treated you "as a mere passive bucket, to be pumped into" (fancy a Carlyle for a passive bucket!), and finally left you "swimming and fluttering in the mistiest wide unintelligible deluge of things, for the most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner." Yet, at times, we are told, "balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and intelligible," would rise out of the haze; and upon these islets the enthusiastic Sterling and others would try to cast anchor. Had they reached the solid foundation of creation, or had they, like Milton's pilot of the small night-foundered skiff, mistaken some metaphysical Kraken for the permanent framework of things?

That question may be answered dogmatically by anyone who pleases. Immovable limits of time and capacity forbid me from attempting to answer it now. My excuse for venturing to say something of Coleridge—certainly one of the most fascinating and most perplexing figures in our literary history—is simply this: I have been forced to investigate with some care the details of his career;

and I ought to be able not to answer the question, but to provide a little "vehiculatory gear" towards answering it. Coleridge's philosophy must of course be judged by considerations extraneous to his personal history. Yet I think, as a professional biographer is in duty bound to think, that philosophy is, more often than philosophers admit, the outcome of personal experience; and Coleridge's singular history may throw some light upon his teaching. Here we meet the hagiologist and the iconoclast, the twin plagues of the humble biographer. The hagiologist burns incense before his idol till it is difficult to distinguish any fixed outline through the clouds of gorgeously tinted vapour. Coleridge thought himself to have certain failings. His relations fully agreed with him. His worshippers regard these meek confessions as mere illustrations of the good man's humility, and even manage to endow the poet and philosopher with all the homely virtues of the respectable and the solvent. To put forward such claims is to challenge the iconoclast. He, a person endowed by nature with a fine stock of virtuous indignation, has very little trouble in picturing the poet-philosopher as a shambling, unreliable, indolent voluptuary, to whom an action became impossible so soon as it presented itself as a duty, and who, even as a man of genius, must be condemned as unfaithful to his high calling. And so we raise the usual edifying discussion as to the privileges of genius. Do they include superiority to the Ten Commandments? Can you expect a poet to confine himself to one wife? May a man neglect his children because he has written the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel"?—points of casuistry, of which, with your leave, I will postpone the consideration to a future occasion.

For my purpose it is enough to ascertain the facts. I have not to decide whether Coleridge should receive excommunication or canonisation; whether he deserved to

go straight to heaven or to pass a period—and, if so, how long a period—in purgatory. It is difficult to settle such questions satisfactorily. I desiderate an accurate diagnosis, not a judicial sentence. Coleridge sinned and repented. I take note of sin and of repentance as indications of character. I do not pretend to say whether in the eye of Heaven the repentance would be an adequate set-off for the sin. But I premise one apology for anything that may sound iconoclastic, and which I think is worth the consideration of the amiable persons who undertake to rehabilitate soiled reputations. A man's weakness can rarely be overlooked without underestimating his strength. If Coleridge's intellect were, as De Quincey said in his magniloquent way, "the greatest and most spacious, the subtlest and most comprehensive, that has yet existed among men" (what a philosopher one must be to pronounce such a judgment!) why were the results so small? Because the ethereal soul was chained to a fleshly carcase. To deny this is to force us to assume that what he did was all that he could do. You must either exaggerate his actual achievements beyond all possible limits, or save your belief in his potential achievements by admitting that his intellect never had fair play.

Let us consider the antecedents of the prophet of Highgate Hill. Was there ever a young man fuller of intellectual promise or of personal charm than the youth of twenty-five, who, in 1797, rambled through the Quantocks discussing and composing poetry with Wordsworth? Circumstances apparently unfavourable had only served to stimulate his intellectual growth. Separated from his family in infancy, to become one of the victims of our public school system—ill-fed, ill-nursed, and ill-taught at Christ's Hospital; urged upon the treadmill of a sound classical education by a rigid schoolmaster, he had assimilated with singular aptitude whatever intellectual food had drifted within his reach. He had caught

glimpses of high metaphysical secrets; he had peered into the mysteries of medical practice; he had bolted a miscellaneous library whole; he had been infected with poetical enthusiasm by the study of that minute day-star, W. L. Bowles; and he had completed his training by falling desperately in love with the inevitable sister of a schoolfellow. It is a comfort to reflect that the best regulated systems of education break down somewhere. Coleridge, it would have seemed, ran every risk of being driven sheep-like along the dull high road of Latin grammar. Nature had prompted him to leap the fences, to expatiate in the wide fields of intellectual and imaginative pasture, and to derive a keener zest for his nourishment from the knowledge that the indulgence was illegitimate. Cambridge, the mother of poets, received him with the kindness she had so often shown to her children. We—I speak as a Cambridge man—we flogged (or nearly flogged) Milton into republicanism; we disgusted Dryden into an anomalous and monstrous preference for Oxford; we bored Gray till, half stifled with academic dulness, he sought more cheerful surroundings in a country churchyard; we left Byron to the congenial society of his bear; we did nothing for Wordsworth, except, indeed, that we took him to Milton's rooms, and there for once (it must really have done him some good) induced him to take a glass too much; and we, as nearly as possible, converted Coleridge into a heavy dragoon. We ordered him to bow the knee to Euclid, and to Newton's "Principia," the only idols whose merits were altogether beyond his powers of appreciation, and by such kindness in disguise induced him to plunge into a precocious breach with the proprieties. A fellowship might have converted him into a solid Church and State don, an oracle of the Combination Room, and a sound judge of port wine. We sternly withheld the temptation. A reformer has to start in life as a rebel.

Coleridge sympathised with the rebellious William Frend, who was being banished from Cambridge for excessive liberalism. He offered his youthful incense to Priestley, the "patriot and saint and sage"—so the young enthusiast called him—who was soon to be expelled by the exuberant loyalty of Birmingham from an ungrateful country. Though never a Jacobin, he became what, in some form or other, a young man ought to become—an enthusiast for the newest lights, a partisan of the ideas struggling to remould the ancient order and raise the aspirations of mankind. The Master of the College shook his reverend head, kindly enough at times, at the lad's vagaries, and forgave him even for that preposterous attempt to become a trooper which never enabled him, with all his subtlety of distinction, to form any clear conception of the difference between a horse's head and its tail. But he could not run in the regular track. He was thrown into the chaotic world to sink or swim by his unassisted abilities. No man had, in some ways, a better floating apparatus. The poetic vein, soon to manifest itself in his best work, was indeed still turbid with the alloy of didactic twaddle. But already he had the versatility, the inherent vitality of intellect, the power of embodying philosophic thoughts in poetic imagery, which made him unrivalled in monologue. He talked better, I am apt to think, with his chum, Charles Lamb, at the "Cat and Salutation," than he ever talked to his worshippers at Highgate Hill. A man is at his best before he is recognised. Coleridge's early letters and essays show the fulness and intellectual vigour, without the too elaborate and slightly sanctimonious circumgyrations, of his later effusions. And his genius was such as implied a double portion of the power of making friends, which, with most of us, wanes so lamentably as the years go by. Lamb, his earliest and latest friend, was already devoted to this brilliant schoolfellow; and if Lamb was

an easy conquest, men of less conspicuously tender nature were equally attracted. He had only to meet Southey at Oxford to swear at once an eternal friendship—a friendship to be cemented by a regeneration of the world.

Coleridge was to be the Plato of a new society to be founded in the wilds of America. There a short and healthy space of daily toil was to provide all that was necessary for a band of poets and philosophers, too benevolent to care for separate property, and worthy founders of an Arcadia of perfect simplicity, refinement, and equality. As for the Eves of the Paradise, were there not three Miss Frickers? Coleridge repelled for a time the too obvious foreboding that Pantisocracy was but a province of dreamland. Dreamland was his reality. For the demands of butchers and bakers he had still a lordly indifference. He had the voice which could charm even a publisher. The prim and priggish Cottle was at once annexed by Coleridge, and all the natural caution of a tradesman did not withhold him from promising a guinea for every hundred lines to be produced by a still untried new poet. What were one hundred lines to the genius which could turn off an act of a tragedy in a morning, and which soon afterwards could build the shadowy palace of Kubla Khan in a dream? Coleridge was justified, in point of bare prudence, in marrying at once on the prospect. Somehow the poetry did not come so fast as the bills. But Coleridge had other strings to his bow. He set up as a lecturer and journalist. His marvellous eloquence condescended for the nonce to wile promises of subscription even from dealers in tallow; and the philosopher—not without a humorous sense of his own absurdity—became a successful commercial traveller. The newspaper of course collapsed almost on the spot. All the arrangements were absurd, and Coleridge's eloquence proved

to be somehow uncongenial to the tallow-dealing interest. But meanwhile, in the course of his journey, Coleridge had incidentally and, as it were, by the mere side glance of his eye, swept up Charles Lloyd, son of a rich banker, who, fascinated and enthralled, left the bank to become an inmate of his teacher's house, and, no doubt, a contributor to its expenses. Poole, a most public-spirited and intelligent man, offered him an asylum at Nether Stowey. The Unitarians, to whom he more or less belonged, were ready to open their pulpit to a preacher whose eloquence promised to rival even the most splendid traditions of the age of Leighton and Jeremy Taylor.

Hazlitt, not yet soured and savage, heard Coleridge preach in 1798; and tells us in true Hazlittian style how his voice rose like a storm of rich distilled perfumes; how he launched into his subject like an eagle dallying with the wind; how, in brief, poetry and philosophy had met together, truth and genius had embraced under the eye and with the sanction of reason. The Unitarian firmament was too cramped for this brilliant meteor; the philosophy expounded from the pulpits seemed to him meagre and rigid; and, while hesitating, he received an offer from the generous Wedgwoods, anxious to spend some part of their wealth in the patronage of genius.

Rumours had reached England by this time that a great intellectual light had arisen in Germany. The Wedgwoods gave Coleridge a modest annuity, unfettered (as I can now say) by any condition whatever, a fact which makes the subsequent withdrawal a harsher measure than has been supposed. Coleridge resolved to go to Germany, catch the sacred fire of the Kantian philosophy, and return to England to regenerate the mind of his countrymen. He started in September 1798, when he was just twenty-six, in company with the friend who alone could be compared to him in intellectual power. Wordsworth had been attracted, as Lamb and

Southey had been attracted before him. Coleridge and Wordsworth had discussed the principles of their common art; and Coleridge had applied them in those wonderful poems, the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel" (the first part), which were to be but the prologue to a fuller utterance; a wonderful prologue, for, though followed by nothing, it remained unique and inimitable. Coleridge was not yet *déterré*, as Pope said of Johnson; the ordinary critics had only a passing smile or sneer for the little clique which published its obscure utterances in a provincial town. Monthly and critical reviewers—the arbiters of taste—would have been astonished to hear that Coleridge and Wordsworth and Lamb and Southey would soon stand in the very front ranks of English literature; and he must have a clearer conscience than I who would cast a stone at critics for not at once detecting the first germs of rising genius. But, as *ex post facto* prophets, we are able to see that Coleridge already had not only given proofs of astonishing power, but had won what was even more valuable, the true sympathy and cordial affection of young men who were the distinct leaders of the next generation. Even material support was not wanting from such men as Poole and Wedgwood, sufficient to ensure a fair start for the little band of prophets. We should have been justified in foretelling, with unusual confidence, a career of surpassing brilliancy for the youth, of whom it seemed only questionable whether he would choose to be a second Bacon or a second Milton.

And if, at that time, anyone could have shown us the same Coleridge at a distance of eighteen years, the worn, depressed, prematurely aged man who took up his abode with Gillman in 1816, we should have been shocked, and yet, perhaps, have been able to utter our complacent "I told you so." What so far had been the achievements of the most brilliant genius of the

generation: a man not only of surpassing ability, but of surpassing facility of utterance; a man whom to set going at any moment was to unlock a perpetually flowing fountain of abounding eloquence? A few newspaper articles and some courses of lectures, he said in 1817, constituted his whole publicity. It may be added that he had jotted down on the margins of books enough detached thoughts to have made some volumes of admirable reflections. But he had achieved nothing to suggest concentrated thought or sustained labour. In a shorter period Scott poured out the whole of the Waverley Novels, besides discharging official duties, and writing a number of reviews and miscellaneous works. I say nothing as to the quality. I am simply thinking of the amount of work; and Coleridge's work cost little labour, for his power of improvisation was among his most marvellous faculties. Why, then, was the work so limited in quantity? The internal facts are sufficiently significant. After his return from Germany in the autumn of 1799, he wrote some articles which certainly proved that his intellect was in full vigour, translated "Wallenstein," and then, in 1800, retired with his family to Keswick. Here at once ominous symptoms begin to show themselves. A strange disquiet is betrayed in his letters; there are painful complaints of ill-health; his poetic inspiration breathes its last in the "Ode to Dejection." He sought in vain to distract painful thought by metaphysical abstractions; he rambled off in 1804 to spend two years and a half in Malta and Italy. Returning to England, he tried lecturing at the Royal Institution, and then settled at Grasmere—separated by fifteen miles of mountain roads from his wife—and repeated his "Watchman" experiment by writing the "Friend." The youthful buoyancy, even flippancy, has departed, though it shows far riper thought and richer intellectual stores. But weariness of spirit

marks every page; the long sentences somehow suggest a succession of stifled groans; as the enterprise proceeds, it can only be kept up by introducing any irrelevant matter that may be on hand—such as old letters from Germany which happened to be in his portfolio, and an extravagant panegyric upon his patron at Malta, Sir Alexander Ball.

The "Friend" soon falls dead, and Coleridge drifts back to London. There he makes efforts, pathetic in their impotence, to keep his head above water. He tries journalism again, but without the occasional triumphs which had formerly atoned for his irregularity. He lectures, and is heard with an interest which shows that, in spite of all impediments, his marvellous powers have at least roused the curiosity of all who claim to have an intellectual taste. He has a gleam of success, too, from the production of his old tragedy, "Remorse," written in the days of early vigour. But some undertow seems to be sucking him back, so that he can never get his feet planted on dry land. He retires to Bristol, and thence to Calne, where he seems to be sinking into utter obscurity. He has almost passed out of the knowledge of his friends, when a last despairing effort lands him at Highgate, and there a rather singular transformation, it may seem at first sight, enables him to become the oracle of youthful aspiration, wisdom, and virtue. Painfully, and imperfectly with their aid, he gathers together some fragments of actual achievement—enough to justify a great, but a most tantalising reputation.

What was the secret of this painful history? Briefly, it was opium. Coleridge said so himself, and all his biographers have stated the facts. Without this statement the whole story would be unintelligible, and we could have done justice neither to Coleridge's intellectual powers nor even to some of his virtues. To tell the story of Coleridge without the opium is to tell the story of Hamlet without

mentioning the Ghost. The tragedy of a life would become a mere string of incoherent accidents. Nor are the facts doubtful. Coleridge, I fear, composed, or invented, for the benefit of Gillman, a certain picturesque "Kendal black drop"—a treacherous nostrum, it is suggested, which gave him relief in his sufferings at Keswick, and overpowered his will before he had recognised its nature. The truth is, as can be abundantly proved by his letters at the time, that he was taking laudanum in large quantities in 1796, that is when he was just twenty-four, under the pressure of illness, but certainly well knowing what he was taking. It was at Keswick, not that he first indulged, but that he first became aware of his almost hopeless enslavement.

After reading many painfully conclusive proofs of this passion, I confess that I think it less remarkable that his demoralisation in this respect seemed to be complete about 1814, than that he succeeded, under Gillman's care, in so far breaking off the habit as to make a certain salvage from the wreck. I simply take note of these facts, and leave anybody who pleases to do the moralising; but I am forced to add a few words upon another topic, to which his apologists have resorted in order to extenuate the opium-eating. Briefly, it has been attempted to save his character by abusing his wife. Undoubtedly, as the recently published Coleorton papers prove, there was a complete want of sympathy. The same documents show that it was not, as had been generally supposed, a case of gradual drifting apart. Proposals for a regular separation had been made by the time of Coleridge's return from Malta. Coleridge's apologists have said that Mrs. Coleridge was one of Iago's women, born "to suckle fools and chronicle small beer," and quite unable to appreciate Kantian metaphysics, or even "Christabel." A very doubtful legend has been put about, that she once said, "Get oop, Coleridge" (a remark for which one can conceive

a sufficient justification), and no man can be expected to care for a woman who says "Get oop," or for her children. From letters of hers which I have seen, I am inclined to think that Mrs. Coleridge must really have been a very sensible woman, who worked hard to educate her own children and the children of her sister, Mrs. Southey, in French and Italian, and who could express herself in remarkably good English. She was no doubt inappreciative of a genius which could not be set to bread-winning. And moreover, when a man has an ecstatic admiration for another woman, it is not likely to make his relations to his wife more pleasant. To speak of all this as a moral excuse for Coleridge is to my mind unmanly. If a man of genius condescends to marry a woman, and be the father of her children, he must incur responsibilities. The fact that he leaves her, as Coleridge did, his small fixed income, the balance of her expenses to be made up by his brother-in-law and other connections, is so far to his credit, but does not excuse him for a neglect of those duties, not to be measured in pounds, shillings, and pence, which a husband and father owes to an innocent woman and three small children. Coleridge's position was no doubt difficult, but the mode in which he solved the difficulty is a proof that opium-eating is inconsistent with certain homely duties.

An experienced person has said, "Do not marry a man of genius." I have no personal interest in that question, nor will I express any opinion upon it, but one is inclined to say, Don't be his brother-in-law, or his publisher, or his editor, or anything that is his if you care twopence—it is probably an excessive valuation—for the opinion of posthumous critics.

But, again, I would avoid moralising. I only ask what is the true inference as to Coleridge's character. And that consideration may bring us back to less painful reflections. It is preposterous to maintain the thesis that Coleridge was

the kind of person to be held up as a pattern to young men about to marry. Opium had ruined the power of will, never very strong, and any capacity he may have had—and his versatility was perhaps incompatible with any great capacity—for concentration on a great task. The consequences of such indulgence had ruined his home life, and all but ruined his intellectual career. But there is also this to be said, that at his worst Coleridge was both loved and eminently lovable. His failings excited far more compassion than indignation. The "pity of it" expresses the sentiment of all eye-witnesses. He was always full of kindly feelings, never soured into cynicism. The strange power of fascination which he had shown in his poetic youth never deserted him. As De Quincey has said: "Beyond all men who ever perhaps have lived, he found means to engage a constant succession of most faithful friends. He received the services of sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, from the hands of strangers attracted to him by no possible impulses but those of reverence for his intellect and love for his gracious nature. Perpetual relays were laid along his path in life of zealous and judicious supporters." Whenever Coleridge was at his lowest, some one was ready to help him. Poole, and Lloyd, and Wedgwood, and De Quincey, had come forward in their turn. Through the dismal years of degradation which preceded his final refuge at Gillman's, the faithful Morgans had made him a home, tried to break off his bad habits, and enabled him to carry on the almost hopeless struggle. When Morgan himself became bankrupt, it is pleasant to know that Coleridge, among whose faults pecuniary meanness had no place, gave what he could—and far more than he could really spare—to help his old friend. When he delivered his lectures or poured out an amazing monologue at Lamb's suppers, or in Godwin's shop, young men, at the age of hero-worship, were already prepared not only to wonder at the intellectual

display, but to feel their hearts warmed by the real goodness shining through the shattered and imperfectly transparent vessel. Coleridge's letters may reveal some part of this charm, though some part, too, of the drawback. His long involved sentences; compared by himself to a Surinam toad with a brood of little toads escaping from his back, wind about in something between a spoken reverie and a sympathetic effusion of confidential confessions. When they touch the practical, *e.g.* publishers' accounts, they are apt to become hopelessly unintelligible. When they expound a vast scheme for a *magnum opus*, or one of the various *magna opera* which at any time for thirty years were just ready to issue from the press, as soon as a few pages were transcribed, we perceive, after a moment, that they are not the fictions of the begging-letter writer, but a kind of secretion, spontaneously and unconsciously evolved to pacify the stings of remorse. There are moments when he is querulous, but we must forgive them to the man who had been hopelessly distanced in popular fame by his inferiors; whose attempts at public utterance had utterly collapsed; whose "Wallenstein" still encumbered his publisher's shelves; whose poetical copyrights had been deliberately valued at *nil*; and whose name was only mentioned in the chief reviews as a superlative for wilful eccentricity and absurdity. And then, at every turn, we come upon frequent gleams, not only of subtle thought and imaginative expression, but of shrewd common-sense, and even at times of a genuine humour, which seems to imply that Lamb was partly serious when he said that Coleridge had so much "f-f-fun" in him. After reading many of the letters, which still remain unpublished, I may say that it is my own conviction that a life of Coleridge may still be put together by some judicious writer, who should take Boswell rather than the "Acta Sanctorum" for his model, which would be as interesting as the great "Confessions," which should

by turns remind us of Augustine, of Montaigne, and of Rousseau, and sometimes, too, of the inimitable Pepys or Boswell himself; which should show the blending of the many elements of a most complex character and a most versatile and opulent intellect; which should often call forth wonder, and smiles, and sighs, and indignation smothered by pity, in one of those unique combinations which it would take a Shakespeare to portray and act, and defy the skill of a psychologist to define.

Only a faint indication of this is to be found in Coleridge's "Apologia," or, as he called it, his "Biographia Literaria," of which I must now say a word. It was written at his very nadir, and published just after he had reached his asylum at Highgate. In this sense it has a special biographical value, though its statements, coloured by the illusions to which he was then specially subject, have passed muster too easily with his biographers. Its aim is chiefly to protest against the neglect of the public and the dispensers of patronage. Such complaints generally remind me of a rifleman complaining that the target persists in keeping out of the line of fire. But if we must pardon something to a man so grievously tried for endeavouring to shift a part of the responsibility upon other shoulders than his own, we must be upon our guard against accepting censures which involve injustice to others. Nothing but Coleridge's strange illusions could be an apology, for example, for his complaints that the Ministry had not rewarded a writer whose greatest successes had been scornful denunciations of their great leader, Pitt. The book, of course, is put together with a pitchfork. It is without form or proportion, and is finally eked out with a batch of the old letters from Germany which he had already used in the "Friend," and apparently kept as a last resource to stop the mouths of printers.

Now it is remarkable that even at this time, when his

demoralisation had gone furthest, he could still pour out many pages of criticism, quite irrelevant to the professed purpose of the book, and yet such as was beyond and above the range of any living contemporary. Coleridge at his worst lost the power of finishing and concentrating —of which he had never had very much—but not the power of discursive reflection. He must be compared not to a tree, which has lost its vital fibre, but to a vine deprived of its props, which, though most of its fruit is crushed and wasted, can yet produce grapes with the full bloom of what might have been a superlative vintage. But there is one fact of the "Biographia" for which the apology of illusion is more requisite even than for his misstatements of fact. Coleridge has often been accused of plagiarism. I do not believe that he stole his Shakespeare criticism from Schlegel, and, partly at least, for the reason which would induce me to acquit a supposed thief of having stolen a pair of breeches from a wild Highlandman. But it is undeniable that Coleridge was guilty of a serious theft of metaphysical wares. The only excuse suggested is that the theft was too certain of exposure to be perpetrated. But as it certainly was perpetrated, this can only be an apology for the motive. The simple fact is that part of his scheme was to establish his claims to be a great metaphysician. But it takes much trouble and some thought to put together what looks like a chain of *à priori* demonstration of abstract principles. Coleridge, therefore, persuaded himself that he had really anticipated Schelling's thoughts and might justifiably appropriate Schelling's words. He threw out a few phrases about "genial coincidence"—perhaps the happiest circumlocution ever devised for what Pistol called "conveying"—and adopted Schelling in the lump. When he had come to an end of Schelling's guidance, he proceeded—with an infantile simplicity which disarms indignation—to write a solemn complimentary letter from himself to himself, pointing out

that the public would have had enough of the discussion, and "Dear C." politely agreed to drop the subject, with proper compliments to his "affectionate, etc."

And now I come to the very difficult task of indicating, as briefly as I can, the bearing of these remarks upon Coleridge's multifarious activity. It is not possible to sum up in a few phrases the characteristics of a man who wrote upon metaphysics, theology, morals, politics, and literary criticism; who made a deep impression in all the departments of thought; whose utterances are scattered up and down in fragmentary treatises, in complex arguments which generally break off in the middle, and in miscellaneous jottings upon the margins of books; whose opinions have been differently interpreted by different disciples, and have in great part to be inferred from his comments upon other writers, and can only be intelligible when we have settled what those writers meant, and what he took them to mean; who frequently changed his mind, and who certainly appears, to thinkers of a different order, to add obscurity even to subjects which are necessarily obscure. Nor is the difficulty diminished when, as in my case, the commentator belongs to what must be called the antagonistic school, and is even most properly to be described as a thorough Philistine who is dull enough to glory in his Philistinism. All that I shall attempt is to select a certain aspect of the Coleridgian impulse, and to say what impression it makes upon a radically prosaic mind.

The brilliant Coleridge of Nether Stowey, the buoyant young poet-philosopher who had not been to Germany, was still a curious compound of imperfectly fused elements. His Liberalism had led him to the Unitarianism of Priestley and the associative philosophy of Hartley. But he had also dipped into Plotinus and into some of the mystical writers who represent the very opposite pole of speculation. The first doctrine was imposed upon him from

without, the other was that which was really congenial to his temperament. For Coleridge was, above all, essentially and intrinsically a poet. The first genuine manifestations of his genius are the poems which he wrote before he was twenty-six. The germ of all Coleridge's utterances may be found—by a little ingenuity—in the "Ancient Mariner." For what is the secret of the strange charm of that unique achievement? I do not speak of what may be called its purely literary merits—the melody of versification, the command of language, the vividness of the descriptive passages, and so forth—I leave such points to critics of finer perception and a greater command of superlatives. But part, at least, of the secret is the ease with which Coleridge moves in a world of which the machinery (as the old critics called it) is supplied by the mystic philosopher. Milton, as Penseroso, implores

> The spirit of Plato to unfold,
> What worlds or what vast systems hold
> The spirit of man that hath forsook
> Her mansion in this fleshy nook,
> And of those demons that are found
> In fire, air, flood, and underground,
> Whose powers have a true consent
> With planet and with element.

If such a man fell asleep in his "high lonely tower" his dreams would present to him in sensuous imagery the very world in which the strange history of the "Ancient Mariner" was transacted. It is a world in which both animated things, and stones, and brooks, and clouds, and plants are moved by spiritual agency; in which, as he would put it, the veil of the senses is nothing but a symbolism everywhere telling of unseen and supernatural forces. What we call the solid and the substantial becomes a dream; and the dream is the true underlying reality. The difference between such poetry, and the poetry of Pope, or even of Gray, or Goldsmith, or Cowper—

poetry which is the direct utterance of a string of moral, political, or religious reflections—implies a literary revolution. Coleridge, even more distinctly than Wordsworth, represented a deliberate rejection of the canons of the preceding school; for, if Wordsworth's philosophy differed from that of Pope, he still taught by direct exposition instead of the presentation of sensuous symbolism. The distinction might be illustrated by the ingenious criticism of Mrs. Barbauld, who told Coleridge that the "Ancient Mariner" had two faults—it was improbable and had no moral. Coleridge owned the improbability, but replied to the other stricture that it had too much moral, for that it ought to have had no more than a story in the "Arabian Nights." Indeed, the moral, which would apparently be that people who sympathise with a man who shoots an albatross will die in prolonged torture of thirst, is open to obvious objections.

Coleridge's poetical impulse died early; perhaps, as De Quincey said, it was killed by the opium; or as Coleridge said himself, that his afflictions had suspended what nature gave him at his birth,

> His shaping spirit of imagination.

So that his only plan was

> From his own nature all the natural man,
> By abstruse research to steal,

and partly, too, I should guess, for the reason that this strange mystic world in which he was at home was so remote from all ordinary experience that it failed even to provide an efficient symbolism for his deepest thoughts, and could only be accessible in the singular glow and fervour of youthful inspiration. The domestic anxieties, the pains of ill-health, the depression produced by opium, were a heavy clog upon an imagination which should try to soar into vast aërial regions. But it may be doubtful whether this peculiar vein of imagination, opened in the

"Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," could in any case have been worked much further.

At any rate, Coleridge, as his imaginative impulse flagged, passed into the reflective stage; and, as was natural, his mind dwelt much upon those principles of art which he had already discussed with Wordsworth in his creative period. In saying that Coleridge was primarily a poet, I did not mean to intimate that he was not also a subtle dialectician. There is no real incompatibility between the two faculties. A poetic literature which includes Shakespeare in the past and Browning in the present is of itself a sufficient proof that the keenest and most active logical faculty may be combined with the truest poetical imagination. Coleridge's peculiar service to English criticism consisted, indeed, in a great measure, in a clear appreciation of the true relation between the faculties, a relation, I think, which he never quite managed to express clearly. Poetry, as he says, is properly opposed not to prose but to science. Its aim, he infers, is not to establish truth but to communicate pleasure. The poet presents us with the concrete symbol; the man of science endeavours to analyse and abstract the laws embodied. Shakespeare was certainly not a psychologist in the sense in which Professor Bain is a psychologist. He does not state what are our ultimate faculties, or how they act and react, and determine our conduct; but, so far as he creates typical characters, he gives concrete psychology, or presents the problems upon which psychology has to operate. Therefore, if poetry, as Coleridge says after Milton, should be simple, sensuous, passionate, instead of systematic, abstract, and emotionless, like speculative reasoning, it is not to be inferred that the poet should be positively unphilosophical, nor is he the better, as some recent critics appear to have discovered, for merely appealing to the senses as being without thoughts, or, in simpler words, a mere animal. The loftiest poet and the

loftiest philosopher deal with the same subject-matter, the great problems of the world and of human life, though one presents the symbolism and the other unravels the logical connection of the abstract conceptions.

Coleridge, having practised, proceeded to preach. That a poet should also be a good critic is no more surprising than that any man should speak well on the art of which he is master. Our best critics of poetry, at least, from Dryden to Matthew Arnold, have been (to invert a famous maxim) poets who have succeeded. Coleridge's specific merit was not, as I think, that he laid down any scientific theory. I don't believe that any such theory has as yet any existence except in embryo. He was something almost unique in this as in his poetry, first because his criticism (so far as it was really excellent) was the criticism of love, the criticism of a man who combined the first simple impulse of admiration with the power of explaining why he admired; and secondly, and as a result, because he placed himself at the right point of view; because, to put it briefly, he was the first great writer who criticised poetry as poetry, and not as science. The preceding generation had asked, as Mrs. Barbauld asked: "What is the moral?" Has "Othello" a moral catastrophe? What does "Paradise Lost" prove? Are the principles of Pope's "Essay on Man" philosophical? or is Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" a sound piece of political economy? The reply embodied in Coleridge's admirable criticisms, especially of Shakespeare, was that this implied a total misconception of the relations of poetry to philosophy. The "moral" of a poem is not this or that proposition tagged to it or deducible from it, moral or otherwise; but the total effect of the stimulus to the imagination and affections, or what Coleridge would call its dynamic effect. That will, no doubt, depend partly upon the philosophy assumed in it; but has no common ground with the merits of a demonstration in Euclid or Spinoza. It is this adoption of

a really new method which makes us feel, when we compare Coleridge, not only with the critics of a past generation, but even with very able and acute writers such as Jeffrey or Hazlitt, who were his contemporaries, that we are in a freer and larger atmosphere, and are in contact with deeper principles. It raises another question, for it leads to Coleridge's most conscious aim. Nothing is easier than to put the proper label on a poet—to call him "romantic," or "classical," and so forth; and then, if he has a predecessor of like principles, to explain him by the likeness, and if he represents a change of principles, to make the change explain itself by calling it a reaction. The method is delightfully simple, and I can use the words as easily as my neighbours. The only thing I find difficult is to look wise when I use them, or to fancy that I give an explanation because I have adopted a classification. Coleridge, both in poetry and philosophy, conceived himself to be one of the leaders of such a reaction. He proposed to abolish the wicked, mechanical, infidel, prosaic eighteenth century and go back to the seventeenth. I do not believe in the possibility or the desirability of any such reaction. I prefer my own grandfathers to their grandfathers, and myself—including you and me—to my grandfathers. I am quite sure that, if I did not, I could not make time run backwards. We are far enough off to be just to the maligned eighteenth century, and to keep all our uncharitableness for our contemporaries—it may do them some good. I would never abuse the century which loved common-sense and freedom of speech, and hated humbug and mystery; the century in which first sprang to life most of the social and intellectual movements which are still the best hope of our own; in which science and history and invention first took their modern shape; the century of David Hume, and Adam Smith, and Gibbon, and Burke, and Johnson, and Fielding, and many old friends to whom I aver incalculable

gratitude; but I admit that, like other centuries, it had its faults. It was, no doubt, unpoetical at its close—almost as unpoetical as the latter half of the nineteenth; and somehow it had fallen into that queer blunder of judging poetry by the canons of science. The old symbolism of an earlier generation had faded, and for Pagan or Christian imagery we had frigid personifications, such even as Coleridge quotes from some prize poem: "Inoculation, heavenly maid!" a deity who could be only adored in a rhymed medical treatise. And Coleridge's charge against the philosophy of the time was really identical with his charge against the poetry.

Poetry, without the mystic or spiritual element, meant Darwin's "Botanic Garden"—an ice-palace, as he called it, a heap of fine phrases and sham personifications. Take the same element from theology, and you have Paley's "Evidences;" from morals, and the residuum is Bentham's utilitarianism. Coleridge's nomenclature expressed this in a fashion. He was fond of saying that all men were born Aristotelians or Platonists: Platonists, if, in his favourite distinction, the reason and the imagination dominated in them, and Aristotelians, if they had only the understanding, the almost vulpine cunning, which was shared even by the lower animals, which meant prudence in morality, reliance upon mere external evidence in theology, and pure expediency in politics. How the Aristotelians had come to rule the world ever since the opening of the eighteenth century is a question which, so far as I know, he never answered. But the effect of their dominion was equally to dethrone reason as to asphyxiate imagination. The two were allies, if not an incarnation of the same faculty. Inversely the Benthamites, till Mill was converted by Wordsworth, regarded poetry as equivalent to mere tintinnabulation and lying, or, as Carlyle's friend put it, the "prodooction of a rude age." It was as much in his character of poet

as of philosopher that Coleridge hated political economy, the favourite science of the Benthamites; for, according to him, it was an illustration of their destructive method. The economist deals with mere barren abstractions, and then misapplies them to the concrete organism, the life of which, according to the common metaphor, has been destroyed by his dissecting knife. Coleridge goes too far in speaking as if analysis were in itself a mischievous instead of an important process, much as Wordsworth thought that every man of science was ready to botanise on his mother's grave. But, on the other hand, the clear conviction that a society could only be explained as an organic and continuous whole enables him to point out very distinctly the limits of the opposite school. One indication of this contrast may be found in Coleridge's theory of Church and State. It is curious that Mill, in his essay upon Coleridge, especially admires him for taking into account the historical element in which Bentham was deficient. It is curious because it is remarkable that the leader of a school which boasted specially of resting upon experience, should admit that it was weak precisely in not appreciating the historical method on which surely experience should be founded. It seems almost as if the antagonists had changed weapons like the duellists in "Hamlet." The *à priori* thinker rests upon experience, and the empiricist upon a really *à priori* method.

The ambiguity indicates Coleridge's peculiar position towards the opposite school. He regards society as an organism, a something which has grown through long centuries, and therefore to be studied in its vital principle, not to be analysed into a mere mechanism for distributing certain lumps of happiness. In doing so he was saying what had been said by Burke, whose wisdom he fully appreciated and whose real consistency he recognised. To my mind, indeed, Burke as a political philosopher was

far greater than Coleridge. But Burke hated the metaphysics in which Coleridge delighted, and therefore with him we seem at best to come upon blank prejudice, or prescription, as the ultimate ground of political science. Coleridge feels the necessity of connecting his organic principles with some genuine philosophical principle, and Mill admits that conservatism in his treatment was something very superior to the mere brute prejudice to which Eldon and Castlereagh appealed, and which was used as a bludgeon by "The Quarterly Review." Unluckily it is here, too, that we find the weakness of Coleridge's character. He tried to put together his views at a time when his mind had been hopelessly enervated; when he could guess and beat about a principle, but could never get it fairly stated or see its full bearings. He is struggling for utterance, still clinging to the belief that he can elaborate a system, but never getting beyond prolegomena and fruitful hints. He says that to study politics with benefit we must try to elaborate the "idea" of Church and State, and the "idea," as he explains, is identical with what scientific people call a law. But how the law or laws of an organism are to be determined by some transcendental principle overruling and independent of experiences, is just the point which remains inexplicable. He seems to appreciate what we now call the historic method. He uses the sacred phrase "evolution," which is simply the general formula of which the historic method is a special application. But we find that by evolution he means some strange process suggestive of his old mystical employment, and even at times talks of heptads and pentads and the "adorable tetractys," which is the same with the Trinity; and connects chemical laws of oxygen and hydrogen gas with the logical formulæ about prothesis, and antithesis, and mesothesis. To state the theory of evolution in verifiable and scientific terms was reserved for Darwin; when we meet it in Coleridge we seem to be

going back to Pythagoras; and yet it is the same thought which is struggling for an utterance in singular and bewildering terms, and moreover it was just the theory which Mill required.

But, to come to a conclusion, though I cannot think that Coleridge ever worked with his mind clear, or was, indeed, capable of the necessary concentration and steadiness of thought by which alone philosophical achievements are possible; though I hold, again, that if he had succeeded he would have found that he was not so much refuting his opponents as supplying a necessary complement to their teaching, I can still believe that he saw more clearly than any of his contemporaries what were the vital issues; that in his detached and desultory and inconsistent fashion he was stirring the thoughts which were to occupy his successors; and that a detailed examination would show in how many directions a certain Coleridgian leaven is working in later fermentations.

Besides the able and zealous disciples who acknowledged his leadership, we may find many affinities in Carlyle's masculine if narrow teaching; or again, in a school which diverged in a very opposite direction, for the theory of Church authority sanctioned by the Oxford disciples of Cardinal Newman is, in spite of its different result, closely allied to Coleridge's; while the modern Hegelians—though they regard him as a superficial dabbler—must admit that he rendered the service (of doubtful value, perhaps) of infecting English thought with the virus of German metaphysics, and will perhaps admit that, in principle, he anticipated some of their most cogent criticisms of the common enemy. Coleridge never constructed a system. If a philosophy, or its creator, is to be judged by the systematic characters, Coleridge must take a very low place. But when we think what philosophical systems have so far been; what

flimsy and air-built bubbles in the eyes of the next generation; how often we desire, even in the case of the greatest men, that the one vital idea (there is seldom so much as one!) could be preserved, and the pretentious structure in which it is involved permitted once for all to burst; we may think that another criterion is admissible; that a man's work may be judged by the stimulus given to reflection, even if given in so intricate a muddle and such fragmentary utterances that its disciples themselves are hopelessly unable to present it in an orderly form. Upon that ground, Coleridge's rank will be a very high one, although, when all is said, the history, both of the man and the thinker, will always be a sad one—the saddest in some sense that we can read, for it is the history of early promise blighted and vast powers all but running hopelessly to waste.

THE END

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